











BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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GENERAL JOFFRE AND HIS BATTLES  
WITH PORTRAIT AND MAPS

*"It is one of the interesting books on the strategy and the important personalities of the war."—New York Times.*

# **FOCH**

**THE WINNER OF THE WAR**







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Marshal Ferdinand Foch.



# FOCH

## THE WINNER OF THE WAR

BY

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TRANSLATED BY MARY CADWALADER JONES



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"It is a mistake to suppose that any one method of attack is better than another; one's action should be determined by circumstances. . . . It is only toward the end of the day, when I perceive that the enemy is tired and has drawn upon most of his resources, that I gather together all the troops which I have been able to keep in reserve, and throw a great mass of infantry, cavalry, and artillery into the field. This makes an *event* which the enemy had not foreseen, and by this means I have almost always been able to win the day."—(Letter from Napoleon to Marshal Gouvion Saint Cyr, quoted by Foch in his lectures at the Ecole de Guerre.)

"Victory will always go to those who deserve her through having stronger will and higher intelligence than others."—(From Foch's lectures at the Ecole de Guerre.)

"Victory is an inclined plane on which a moving body, unless stopped, gains speed by its own momentum."—(From an interview with Foch in September, 1918, quoted by M. Babin in *l'Illustration*.)



## CHAPTER I

### SOME GLIMPSES OF FOCH

ON the 30th of August, 1914, a few days before the first battle of the Marne, I was at Attigny, a little town on the Aisne not far from Rethel.

Ours was the "Moroccan Division," which had won immortal laurels in the first days of the war, and we were falling back from the Belgian frontier, northeast of Charleville, in the direction of Rheims and Epernay, covering the Fourth Army.

Never was there a stranger retreat. Day by day we gave up more and more ground, leaving flourishing towns, prosperous villages, and fertile fields at the mercy of a brutal enemy, and yet not one of us, from our great chief down to the humblest private soldier, ever doubted for a moment that in the end victory would be ours. Every now and then we got a chance to prove our faith; the division would halt, face about, and attack the Boches boldly, and, although they always outnumbered us greatly, being often two or three to our one, we knocked them about and held our ground.

We were in full retreat, and yet our morale was as high, our confidence as great, as though we had been advancing. There is perhaps no instance in history

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where a million men, forced back by an invading enemy along a front hundreds of miles long, were yet firmly convinced all the while that they could not be beaten.

In company with a fellow staff-officer I had been sent with orders that morning to Attigny, and there we saw a general pacing mechanically up and down in the open space before the little church. His hands were behind his back; his face was grave, his expression anxious but firm. It was Foch. A poilu in one of the passing columns pointed him out to a comrade, saying: "That's the boss; he doesn't look any too easy to get on with to-day."

It was the first time I had seen Foch, and I shall never forget the impression he made on me.

All around the brooding and preoccupied chief the retreat was in full swing, filling the road and the village streets with the incessant tramp of infantry and the heavy roll of gun-carriages and ammunition-caissons.

From time to time the general glanced quickly at the troops as they passed before him, and once or twice he beckoned to an officer and questioned him briefly. Then he put his hands behind his back again and resumed his walk.

I came across my old friend and comrade André Tardieu, a lieutenant on Foch's staff, and in a few minutes he told me what was going on. Foch had been summoned from Lorraine, where he was commanding the Twentieth Army Corps, and had been

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for twenty-four hours in command of a new army, the Ninth, which our generalissimo, Joffre, had constituted for him between the Fourth and Fifth Armies. The creation of this army, at a point of the utmost importance in the centre of our front, the choice of Foch to lead it, the formation of Maunoury's army on the left wing, in close connection with the defenses of Paris—these were the germs from which the victory of the Marne was to be developed, the decisions and the choice which led to our triumph. To Joffre belongs the eternal honor of having made these decisions and this choice at the very moment when they were essential.

It has been my fortune to see at close range, so that I could study them day by day and hour by hour, some of the great battles of modern history; that of Liao-Yang during the Russo-Japanese War, and those of the Marne and of the Yser during the war just come to an end.

When I go over in my mind the succession of movements culminating in what military men call "the decision" I remember that in each case there were points of marked bifurcation, where the course of the battle instead of going in one direction might easily have followed an entirely different line if some particular pressure had not been applied, or some obstacle put in the way. These points of bifurcation may be termed the "moments" of a conflict.

In the evening of the 8th of September, 1914, the

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third day of the battle of the Marne, the situation of Foch's army appeared to be critical, if not desperate. His centre and his right wing had been violently forced back, so that his front was bevelled, and the fate of the whole army hung on its left wing, composed of two divisions, the Moroccan and the Forty-second, which clung solidly and obstinately to the outskirts of the plateau overlooking the marshes of St. Gond. If those divisions, which had already made superhuman efforts and suffered heavy losses, were pushed over into the plain, the centre of the whole French army must inevitably give way.

But, most fortunately for France, a great leader was on the ground. With the intuition of genius, Foch saw that the Germans, as well as ourselves, were almost at the last gasp. A vigorous blow on our part might, and should, give us the victory, and he resolved to strike. One of his corps commanders demurred, saying: "My men are tired out," only to receive the Spartan answer: "So are the Germans. Attack!"

While the fate of the day hung thus in the balance, Foch decided on the movement which turned the scale on the side of victory. Taking advantage of the situation of the German army, which confronted him at an angle, he took his left division, the Forty-second, moved it quickly across to his right, and threw it against his assailant's flank; the enemy, surprised and disabled by this unexpected attack, gave way and fell back.

This manœuvre, conceived and carried out by

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Foch, was one of the decisive *moments* of the battle, and also one of the great moments in the world's history.

Three weeks later, as we were in pursuit of the retreating German army, we found ourselves on the outskirts of Rheims, where our line had become stationary for a time. One afternoon I was at the fort of Montbr  with my chief, General Humbert, who had been promoted to the command of the Thirty-second Army Corps. One of our officers pointed out a powerful limousine, evidently on its way toward the fort, and a few minutes later General Joffre and General Foch appeared, having come to pay General Humbert a visit of congratulation. The two great generals seemed to be on the most intimate terms; they were both so calm, so self-possessed, and so sure of themselves that a feeling of entire confidence seemed to pass from them into each one of us.

Late in the afternoon of the 4th of October the headquarters of our corps was at Rilly-la-Montagne, surrounded by the plucky vine-dressers of the Champagne district, who were gathering in their grapes under shell-fire as if nothing out of the way was going on. A telephone call came from Ch lons, where General Foch had his headquarters: "Will General Humbert come to Ch lons at once, to take command of the Ninth Army, as General Foch is called to duty elsewhere."

Half an hour later the motor-car was ready, our

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luggage was packed, and I was on my way to Châlons with my general.

The prefecture of Châlons, a charming building, one of the marvels of French art, was full of life and animation. General Foch was to be off in a moment, just as soon as he had seen his successor. Two open touring-cars were already in the courtyard, and orderlies were putting in his slender luggage. Where was he going? I managed to get Tardieu, who was to accompany him, into a corner and learned that Foch was to act as deputy for the generalissimo, Joffre, and would be in command of the group of northern armies, of those under Castelnau and De Maudhuy, and also of the territorial divisions and the cavalry corps which, with the Belgians and the British, were to hold back the German advance to the sea. It was a very important command, and its rapid organization proved the elastic intelligence and the power of rapid decision possessed by the French General Staff.

Once again, when a leader was needed to undertake a strenuous and responsible task, the choice fell upon Foch.

The prefecture was thronged with men, some going off and some staying behind—by far the greater number being in the first category. The general only took with him Colonel Weygand, his right-hand man (who never left his side for a moment during the whole campaign), and two or three officers.

Foch appeared in the doorway and the prefect, whose guest he had been, came to wish him goodspeed.

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The general shook hands with a few civilians, saluted his officers hastily, saying: "Au revoir, gentlemen, I am grateful for your services and I thank you"; and in another instant the car had rushed off into the night, bearing him to still higher fortunes.

Toward the end of October our army corps also started for Flanders, where the fighting was already intense, and where interest chiefly centred from that time forward. Our Forty-second Division, commanded by the intrepid Grossetti, got there a few days before us, and immediately on arriving held the extreme end of the left wing, along the sea front, protecting the retreat of the Belgian army and holding back the German thrust.

We made the journey in motor-cars, by way of Villers-Cotterets, Compiègne, Doullens, and St. Pol, and at Cassel we stopped for several hours at General Foch's headquarters. Cassel is a strange and interesting little town, perched on a solitary peak, from which it looks proudly over the wide and water-soaked Flemish plain. It makes a magnificent observatory, like the bridge on which a captain stands throughout the storm and guides his vessel safely into port. The Germans, who were resolved to reach Calais, cost what it might, were dealing heavy and repeated blows to the British and Belgian troops who were wavering, and, if left to themselves, might have fallen back. It is now permissible to say that if they had given way the Germans would have been on their heels in Dun-

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kerque and Calais, and, once installed in those two ports, as at Ostend and Zeebrugge, they would have dominated and been masters of the Channel by means of their long-distance guns, their Zeppelins, and, above all, their submarines. In that case our communication with England by sea would have been seriously if not irremediably affected, and the war in great measure lost.

Fortunately Foch was there. All the available troops which the French High Command could give him, all the divisions carried to the spot by our French railways (which never before did us such good service) were thrown by him into the fiery furnace as soon as they arrived. He used them hurriedly as buttresses to shore up his swaying lines and to stop, now here and now there, the gaps which opened one after another. Thanks to his unwavering confidence, to his tenacity which never let go its hold, he upheld and inspired the wills of others who, without him, would have lost their grip. And with him intelligence is on the same plane as character. His keen and accurate eye searches out the weak side of an adversary; he knows how much fatigue and exhaustion may lie behind apparent force and repeated blows. The town hall of Cassel is an old building on a picturesque little square, and some of these days a marble slab should be put on its front with these words inscribed thereon: "From here the battle of the Yser was won."

Every now and then, during the course of that battle, I saw the general, sometimes at Cassel and once at



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Poperinghe, where he had convoked the commanders of the different army corps in order to give them his instructions. He was always the same; somewhat abrupt in manner and yet very calm; sparing of words, his questions precise and to the point, going directly to the heart of what he wanted to know; his orders short and clear, leaving no uncertainty in the minds of those to whom they were addressed, and, above all, no matter how grave the situation might be, as soon as one came within his influence one felt the unshakable confidence, the atmosphere of serenity and assuredness of victory which seemed to surround the general and those who worked with him. His headquarters might have been called a Temple of Faith; those who entered it disturbed and depressed came out cheered and strengthened.

In October, 1916, I was sent on a mission to the Russian front.

A short time before I left, General Foch did me and my old friend James Hyde the honor of inviting us to spend the day at Villers-Bretonneux, where his headquarters then were. Our offensive on the Somme, which had been launched, directed, and controlled by him, was drawing to a close, and although it had been made with insufficient means its result was important as it wore away and disintegrated the German army. We knew later how serious this disintegration had been; as a matter of fact, Germany was within a hand's breadth of a military catastrophe from which she

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owed her escape to a burst of energy on her part and still more to the grave mistakes made by the Allies.

General Foch was living in a villa surrounded by a charming park, and he invited us to lunch. His staff-officers shared his table, as well as General Weygand and the liaison officer of the British General Staff, Colonel Dillon, a typical Irish gentleman, tall, thin and wiry, ruddy of face, and apparently quite at home among his French comrades. There was also a Belgian major and five or six French officers. As usual, Foch's staff was small, but the efficiency of its members more than made up for any apparent shortage.

During the war I happened to be brought into contact with many groups of staff-officers, but nowhere was there such an atmosphere of frank gayety and good humor as that in which we now found ourselves. There was not a trace of stiffness or restraint; jokes and clever remarks flew from one end of the table to the other, and the general was the first to laugh.

After luncheon he took my companion and myself into his study and gave me a letter of introduction to General Janin, the head of our military mission on the Russian front, of whom he thought very highly. He also gave me advice regarding the objects of my own mission, which later I found extremely valuable. Some years before the war he had gone to Russia to follow the great military manœuvres, and although I flattered myself that I knew the country pretty well, having travelled from one end of it to the other and lived

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there for months at a time, some of his observations were so apt and so profound that they made a deep impression on me. The fact is that the general is not only a soldier but more or less of a philosopher, an historian, and a statesman.

In the month of August of the following year, some months after the outbreak of the Russian revolution, he wished to see me on the very day of my arrival from Petrograd. He was then chief of the General Staff, and I saw him in his office on the Boulevard des Invalides at Paris. I gave him a brief and accurate summary of my impressions regarding conditions in Russia, which were pessimistic in the extreme. Demoralization seemed to be spreading on every hand; the army was becoming more and more undisciplined; the weakness of Kerensky was manifest, and it was clearly impossible for him to hold his country back any longer from the abyss into which she would speedily plunge.

Foch did not seem to be particularly astonished at my revelations. He asked me some searching questions; first as to the army: What parts of the front had I visited since the revolution? What was the exact situation of the officers as to prestige and influence over their men? Were there *Soviets* everywhere? How did they work? After the army came the railways: How many days had it taken me to go from the Caucasus to Petrograd? Did the trains run on time? Were the stations clear or blocked up? Then it was the question of the food-supply and so on.

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I answered this concise and comprehensive interrogatory as best I could, and the general summed up my conclusions and ended our interview in his somewhat abrupt fashion.

"I gather," he said, "that you believe Russia to be played out, and that before long there will be no more Russian front. Well, even supposing that you are over-pessimistic, it is imperative that we should face such a possibility. If the squall may strike us we must be ready for it."

The calm confidence of the great leader cheered me, and indeed I had need of cheer, for I had just gone along the greater part of the Russian lines, and having seen with my own eyes how far they stretched, the mere idea that this mighty front was about to crumble oppressed me like a nightmare.

I had said to myself that at the lowest reckoning, and not counting the Austrian army, fifty German divisions would before long become available to be thrown against us, and, moreover, there was a vast amount of artillery by means of which the Germans had been able to control the long-drawn Russian lines aided by a comparatively small force.

Could we, after three years of exhausting struggle, during which our country had been bled white, hold out against these new forces? And if we did manage to resist them, would it not be at the cost of overwhelming sacrifices?

I had been continually tormenting myself with these questions ever since my return from Russia; now I was

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face to face with a great leader who had information and statistics much more accurate and detailed than I could give him, who could therefore foresee future dangers and change his plans in order to avert them. The collapse of Russia would not take him by surprise; it was easy to see that he expected it, yet his every word and gesture showed confidence and optimism; an optimism not unreasoning, like that of the Turks, but the result of an exact knowledge of the facts and a just appreciation of the relative strength of the forces on both sides.

It was impossible not to share his faith: to believe with, or rather in, him.

From that time forward, whenever the outlook seemed especially dark, my thoughts went back to that short conversation with Foch, every detail of which remained fixed in my memory, and the recollection acted on my spirits like a strong tonic, reviving and strengthening my belief in our ultimate victory.

During those tragic days of the spring of 1918, when the British army covering Noyon was forced back, I was in the depths of Algeria, two hundred kilometres below Laghouat, far away from all information except the laconic official communiqués which came twice a day, only to give us the torturing news of the continued German advance.

Then one day there came a telegram that Foch had been made generalissimo over all the Allied forces, with full powers to co-ordinate them and carry out his own plans; at once I remembered his words to me,

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and the doubts which I had not been able to repel disappeared, never to return.

From time to time during the war I jotted down these notes describing Foch as he appeared to me.

He is of medium height, neither tall nor short, and strongly built without any superfluous weight, seeming to be alert as well as powerful; his forehead is broad and well shaped, his nose straight and clean-cut; a gray mustache hides the lips which hold his perpetual cigar. His eyes are his most striking feature; their look is at one moment abstracted, as if his thoughts were far away, and the next instant extraordinarily keen, darting suddenly from under somewhat heavy lids. His utterance is crisp and at times rather abrupt; his voice is that of one used to command. He gives the impression of being frank, loyal, and clear-sighted; if I had to choose a motto for the general I think this would suit him as well as another: "Clear vision."

He is a man who stands firmly face to face with reality, and his searching eye and disciplined brain enable him to see a situation as a whole, while taking due account of its details. Nothing comes between him and men and things as they really are; no preconceived idea is allowed to obscure his vision or warp his judgment. Nor does he underrate any obstacles which may confront him; they are duly weighed and allowance made for them in his final decision.

This quality is of the highest importance in the make-up of a great military chief, yet it is found but rarely.

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To my mind the greatest mistake made by the German staff-officers during the war, and the direct cause of their defeat, was that they never, especially in the crucial first days, saw their adversaries including France, the most powerful of them all, as they really were. A course of systematic undervaluation of the Allied forces, material as well as moral, led in the end to confusion and defeat.

No man can be a great leader unless there is equilibrium between his intellect and character; between the power to understand and the will to execute. Napoleon, who was certainly an authority, has laid this down as an axiom not to be controverted.

In the case of Foch this equilibrium is, humanly speaking, perfect. The extreme quickness of perception and the vivid imagination which he owes to his southern blood are tempered and mastered by strong common sense and a judicial mind accustomed to look at matters calmly and slowly, to weigh one consideration against another before coming to a definite conclusion. These qualities seem contradictory, and in nine men out of ten possession of one set means exclusion of the other, but in Foch they balance each other and are fused into a whole, and from this harmonious whole comes what we call his "genius."

## CHAPTER II

### HIS FAMILY AND HIS CAREER

IN the little Pyrenean town of Tarbes an unpretending house still stands on a corner of the rue Saint Louis, and there General Foch was born at ten o'clock in the evening of October 2d, 1851.

His father was employed in the civil service, and every one knows that the children of such functionaries come into the world wherever the chances and changes of an administrative career happen to have placed their parents at the time.

The family really belongs, however, at Valentine, a small place in the department of the Haute Garonne, a few kilometres from St. Gaudens; Foch is therefore a "meridional," like Joffre and Castelnau, who are his close contemporaries.

For at least two centuries the Foch family had been settled in this region, which is not mountainous, and yet not altogether flat, but M. Cossira has recorded a tradition that Foch's ancestors moved there from Alsace at the time of the Reformation.<sup>1</sup>

The derivation of the family name is uncertain. In the dialect of that part of the country "fire" is called

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted for this information to the articles published by M. Cossira, who went to the trouble of making careful and accurate investigations on the spot. I have also been greatly helped by the little book of my friend René Puaux.



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"fioch," an etymology which appeals to me greatly, and, unless the philologists object, we may as well stick to that, and seek no further.

Valentine, the chief town of the district of Petit Comminges, formerly spread over more ground and had more inhabitants. One half of it belonged to the King of France, the other half to the Duc de Bellegarde.

The old registers kept by the priests of the parish are now filed among the municipal archives, and in them may be seen the entries of several generations of the Foch family, between 1690 and the French Revolution. Among them M. Cossira found the baptism recorded, on the 11th of November, 1753, of Dominique, "legitimate son of Sieur Dominique Foch and Bernarde Lasserre, his wife." He was the marshal's grandfather.

From father to son the family were dealers in wool; they bought fleeces, washed and prepared them, and sold them to the local weavers. Dominique Foch followed in the same footsteps, and on the 18th of May, 1790, he was married at Arreau, in the valley of the Aure, to Mademoiselle Ducuing, the daughter of a wholesale merchant of that neighborhood. One of her uncles, Dominique Ducuing, related to many of the leading families of the region, was made general of the Legion of Aure.

The Foch family were highly thought of at Valentine, and Dominique played a part of some importance during the Revolution; he was a member of the Garde

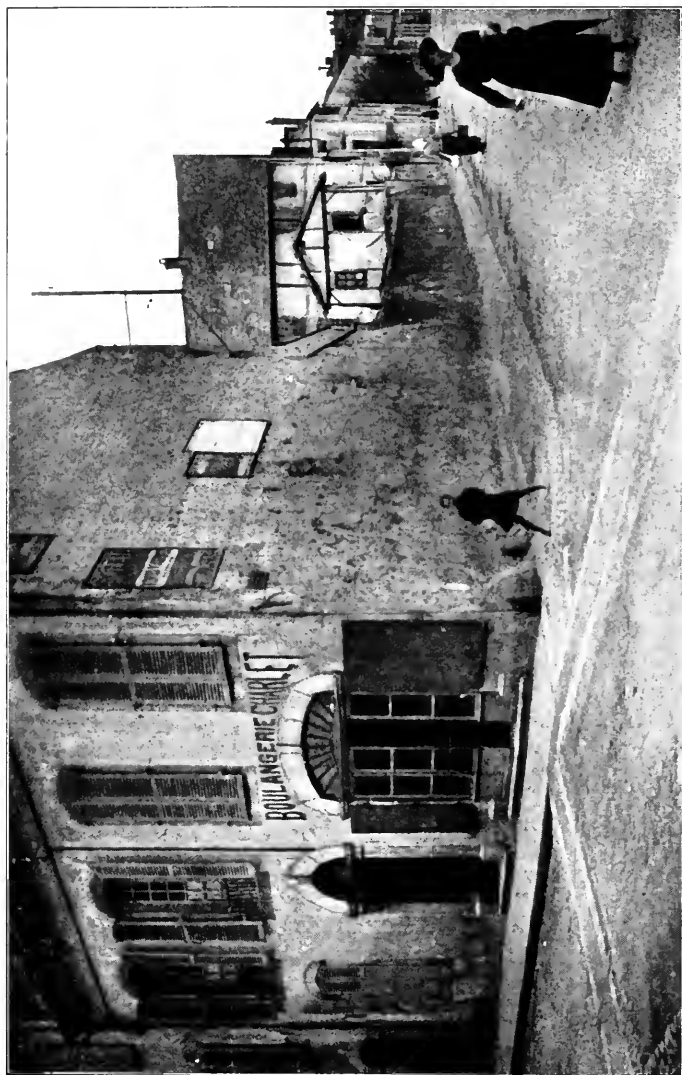
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Nationale, and under the consulate in 1802 he became mayor of his commune. Like many of his contemporaries, he was an enthusiastic admirer of the first consul, to which he bore testimony when his son was born by giving him the Christian names of Bertrand-Jules-Napoléon.

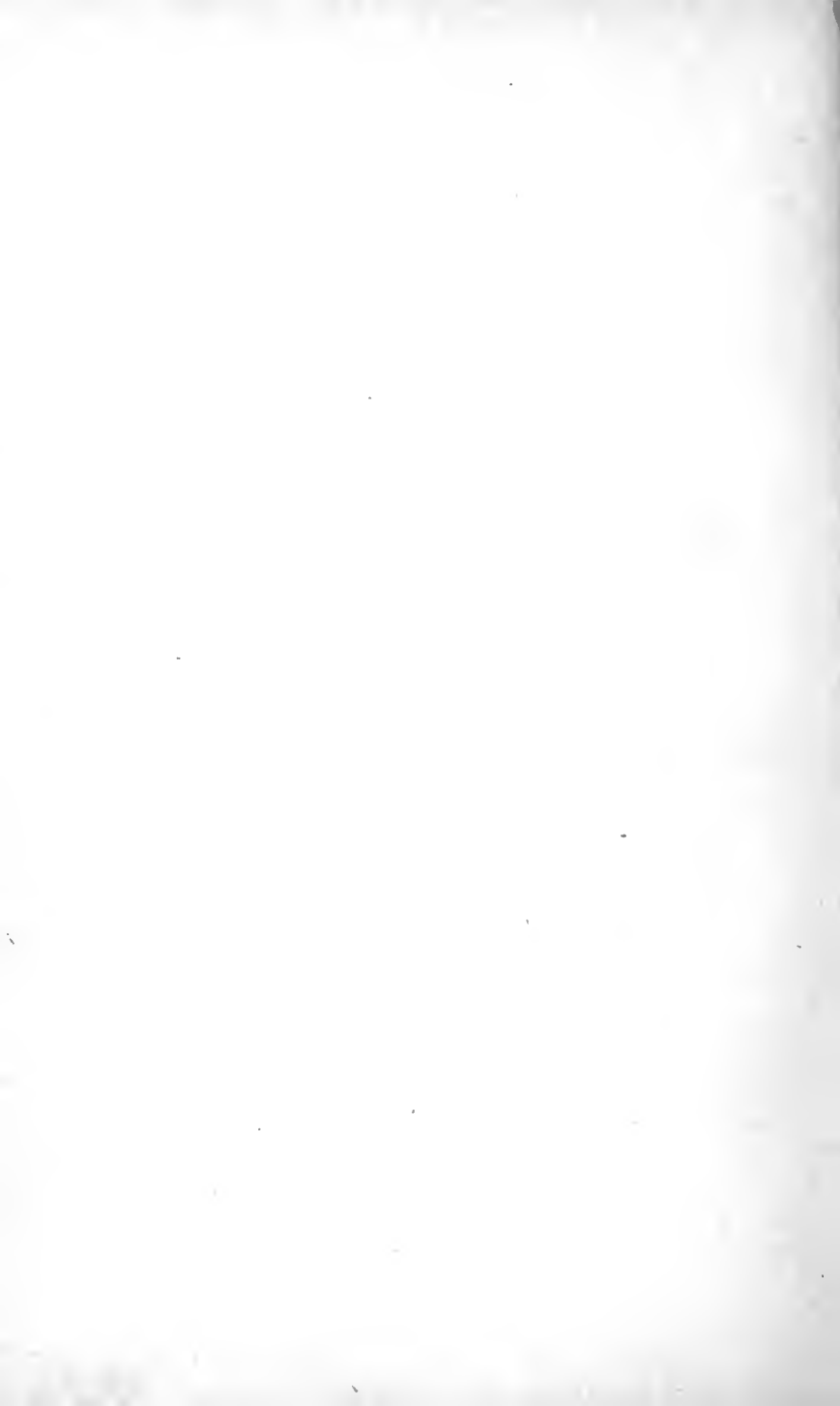
Thus the man who was to be one of the greatest among all the great generals of history, destined to be the leader of armies more numerous and more powerful than had ever been united under the command of one chief, had for his father a man named Napoléon.

Dominique Foch was both industrious and enterprising, losing no opportunity to increase his holdings; he rebuilt the factory which had come to him from his parents, enlarging it and adding many improvements before his death in 1804.

His son, Bertrand-Jules-Napoléon, completed his education under the guardianship of his uncle, but instead of going on with the family business he went into the civil service, being first made counsellor of the prefecture in the department of the Hautes Alpes, and next, by order of the President of the Republic, Louis Napoleon, on the 30th of September, 1849, he was sent to Tarbes, where, on the 30th of January, 1850, he was appointed secretary-general of the prefecture. He had married Marie-Sophie-Jacqueline Dupré, the eldest daughter of an officer in the armies of Napoleon, who had given him the cross of the Legion of Honor after the Spanish War. Dupré was a native of Argeles-Gazost, a small watering place in the department of the Hautes Pyrénées, and his son was professor in the



The house in which Foch was born.



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faculty of medicine at the University of Montpellier and senator from the Hautes Pyrénées.

Therefore the marshal is directly descended from "meridional" stock, both on his father's side and his mother's, and it is also almost entirely Pyrenean, which means that the vivacity of the southern race is tempered by the cool-headedness of the mountaineer, making a most fortunate mixture of quickness of mind and steadiness of purpose.

When the future marshal was born in the little house, No. 43 rue Saint Louis, his father had already two children.<sup>1</sup>

Ferdinand's elder sister, Eugénie, or "Génie Foch," as she is called by her neighbors, lives quietly in the old family house at Valentine. The second son, Gabriel, is a lawyer at Tarbes, while a younger brother and fourth child, Germain, became a Jesuit and is at present at Montpellier. His relations with his famous brother have always been exceedingly affectionate,

<sup>1</sup> Here is his birth certificate:

"Foch, Ferdinand, no. 327.

"Office of the Mayor in the Town Hall of the City of Tarbes, October 4th, 1851. Has appeared before us, Jean Bordes, Mayor of the said city and officer of the civil service of the commonwealth, Bertrand-Jules-Napoléon Foch, Secretary General of the Prefecture of the Hautes Pyrénées, aged 47 years, living at Tarbes, presenting to us a male child born on the 2nd of this October, at ten o'clock in the evening, in the Maison Blancmann in this city, rue St. Louis no. 43, said child being the issue of said Foch and of his wife, Marie-Sophie-Jacqueline-Dupré, aged 37 years, and declaring that said child is to be named Ferdinand. This presentation and declaration is made in our presence and in that of François Carrel, tanner, and Jean Prouanne, also a tanner, aged respectively 32 and 43 years, living at Tarbes, who have complied with the law by signing with us, after having heard it, this certificate of birth.

J. PROUANNE.  
FOCH.

FRANÇOIS CARREL.  
J. BORDES.

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and I have been told that the marshal finds (or makes) time to write him a few lines every day with his own hand no matter how hard he may be pressed.

M. Cossira says that the room in which Foch was born is just as it was in 1851; two large windows give on the street, and the bed is, as usual, in an alcove at the back. The apartment consisted of eight large rooms on the same floor, with rooms for the children on a court, next door to the lycée or high school.

A white marble tablet has recently been placed on the house with the following inscription:

*Here was born on the 2nd of October, 1851,*

*FOCH (Ferdinand)*

*Chief of the Great General Staff of the  
Armies of the Republic*

We may remark in passing that this inscription can scarcely be called up to date, and could well be enriched by a further line or two.<sup>¶</sup>

The children of the family always spent their holidays at Valentine, where they were commonly spoken of as "the little Napoleons." When Ferdinand was ten years old he and his elder brother Gabriel were sent to the lycée at Tarbes, known now as the Lycée Théophile Gautier, whose old front bears this odd inscription:

*"Collegium Tarbiense stet domus haec fluctus donec formica  
ebibat et totem testudo perambulet orbem—1699."*

*("May this building stand until an ant has drunk the ocean  
dry and a tortoise crept around the globe.")*

1861  
11. 326

75 = feuille.  
1861

Les mil huit cent cinquante et un, le quatre octobre,  
à dix heures du matin, en l'Hôtel de la Mairie de la ville de Tarbes,  
par-devant nous Jean Choise,  
Maire de ladite ville, <sup>et de l'époque pour remplir les fonctions d'Officier</sup>  
public de l'état civil, a comparu Gaston Foch, <sup>né le 10 novembre 1824</sup>  
secrétaire principal de la Préfecture de  
Haute-Garonne, âgé de quarante sept ans  
domicilié à Tarbes, lequel nous a présenté un  
enfant d'un sexe masculin né le deux octobre  
courant, à dix heures du jour dans la  
maison Blondemann, en cette ville, rue St Louis.  
Il s'est fait comparant ce dit enfant  
Joséphine Jacqueline Dupré, son épouse,  
rentière, âgée de trente neuf ans; auquel  
enfant il a déclaré donner le prénom de  
Ferdinand: Le dit présentateur en  
déclaration faite en présence de Jean  
Carreau, Pamont, âgé de trente deux ans  
et Jean Proutaud, aussi teneur,  
âgé de quarante trois ans, domiciliés  
à Tarbes, qui ont signé avec nous et  
le comparant. J'ai reçu, après lecture  
faite sur présent acte de naissance.

Foch Gaston Foch

Copy of Foch's birth certificate.





## HIS FAMILY AND HIS CAREER

The secretary-general of the prefecture had been appointed paymaster of the public funds at Rodez, but it happened that this post was discontinued, so he returned to Valentine while awaiting a new position, and sent his children to the seminary at Polignan, where Gabriel and Ferdinand finished the second stage of their education. Finally he was made collector of taxes at Saint Etienne; he moved there with his family and at the Collège Saint Michel in that town, which was under the direction of the Jesuits, Ferdinand received his bachelor's degree.

He was always a diligent student, winning the approval of all his masters; when only twelve years old his favorite reading was Thiers' "History of the Consulate and Empire," and later the professor who taught him mathematics said: "His mind turns naturally to geometry; he has in him the makings of a polytechnician."

After taking his degree he went therefore to the Collège de Saint Clément at Metz, also directed by the Jesuits, as they had made a great reputation by their excellent preparation of pupils wishing to enter the military schools—the Polytechnic and Saint Cyr.

One of his fellow students has since described him in an article published in the *Gaulois* over the signature of "Memor":

"He was not like all the other students, being at the same time vigorous yet gentle, shy yet cordial, impulsive yet reserved; he had a square chin and fair hair; he was apt to look down at the ground if he were

## FOCH

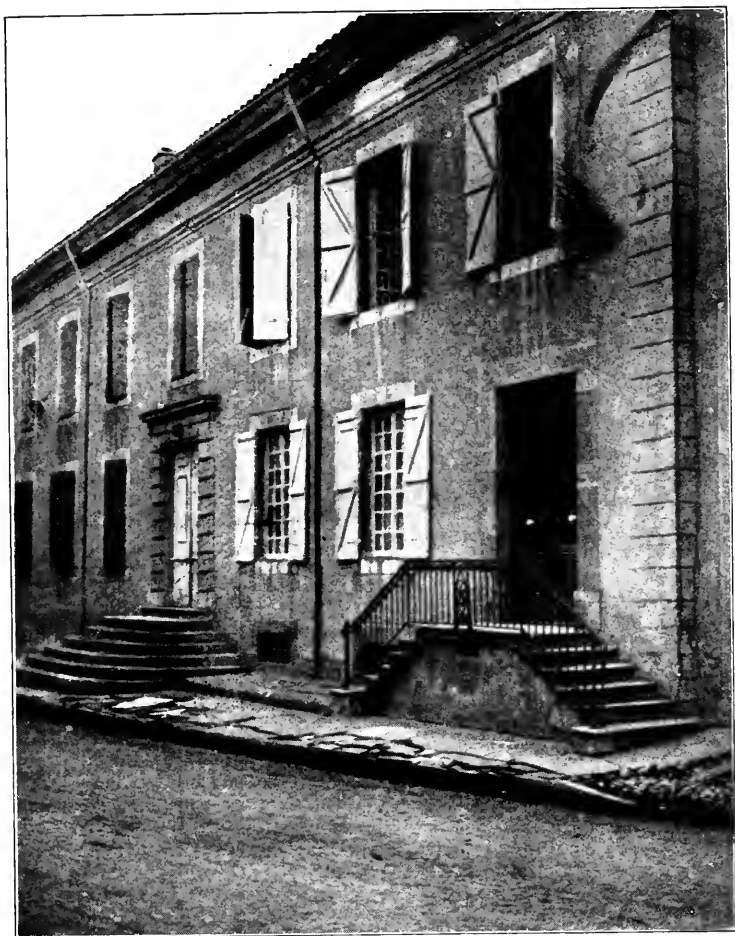
walking alone, but always looked full in the face of any one who spoke to him."

That was in 1869, the year before the Franco-Prussian War. When it broke out Foch enlisted for its duration, and was assigned to the depot of the 4th Regiment of infantry which was first at Saint Etienne, and later at Châlons-sur-Saône. Having been discharged when peace was signed, in January, 1871, he returned at once to Metz to go on with his studies. His best friend, Rivet de Chaussepierre, a second lieutenant, had been killed in action. "A glorious death, and one to be envied!" said his comrade. "You shall be avenged."

By that time Metz had been annexed by Germany. He plunged again into his studies under the able direction of Father La Couture, a distinguished mathematician, and Father Saussier, who had been an officer in the navy and who took a great interest in him. In July, 1871, he went for his examinations to Nancy, which was still occupied by German troops, and on the 1st of November of that year he was received into the Ecole Polytechnique, his number being 76.

It was a tragic moment for France, as the horrors of the Commune had been added to the misfortunes of the war. During the insurrection a party of the Communists invaded the school and tried to hold it. A battalion of chasseurs took it by assault on the 24th of May, and a certain number of the rebels were shot in one of the courtyards.

At the end of Foch's first year his rating had moved



House of the Foch family at Valentine.



## HIS FAMILY AND HIS CAREER

up from 76 to 47, and then, just as he was beginning his second, there came an appeal to polytechnicians to enter the Ecole d'Application at Fontainebleau as artillery and engineer officers were urgently needed in order to restore the depleted army to its proper strength.

Foch was among those who responded, and on the 10th of February he entered the school at Fontainebleau, leaving it in October, 1874, as a second lieutenant. At his own request he was assigned to the 24th regiment of artillery, then stationed at Tarbes; so he found himself back on his native soil and among his own people. Then, at the end of two years, he took a course at the Ecole de Cavalerie at Saumur, at which he came out number four, and after Saumur, in 1878, he was made captain of the 10th regiment of artillery stationed at Rennes.

While on duty there he married Mademoiselle Julie Bienvenue, of Saint-Brieuc, and became the owner of the old estate of Traoufeunteniou at Ploujean, near Morlaix, where, in an ancient Breton château, the future marshal passed most of his leaves of absence.

His father died on the 30th of March, 1880, at the age of seventy, to be followed by his widow three years later.

After a time Captain Foch was summoned to Paris by what is known as the "section technique" of the Ministry of War, and was among those chosen for the Ecole de Guerre in 1885. He left it in 1887, coming out number four, as he had done at Saumur. After that

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he was put on the staff of a division which was quartered at Montpellier, and returned to Paris in 1891 as a major attached to the General Staff, his especial department being the third bureau, that of works.

After that he was in command of the 3rd battery of horse artillery at Vincennes, but was called back to the General Staff in 1894, and on the 31st of October, 1895, he was appointed associate professor of military history, strategy, and applied tactics at the Ecole Supérieure de Guerre, or Staff College. In 1896 he was promoted to a lieutenant-colonelcy and made full professor.

From their beginning, his lectures were considered remarkable, and the attention of all intelligent men was drawn to the young professor. An article in the *Correspondant* signed "Miles,"<sup>1</sup> which M. René Puaux quotes, is evidently written from personal recollection and gives a distinct idea of the effect produced by Foch upon those who studied under him:

"The series of officers who succeeded each other at the Ecole de Guerre between 1896 and 1901 will never forget the impressions which they received through their professor of strategy and applied tactics. This course of lectures always aroused lively interest and attention; it was regarded as the foundation of all that was taught at the War College, and the distinguished masters who had filled the chair had given it great prestige. Consequently, the forty-eight officers who were promoted to the college came to this course

<sup>1</sup> A soldier.

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not only with a keen desire to form and develop their military judgment but also to come into personal contact with the expert who was about to teach them the doctrine of scientific warfare.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Foch more than fulfilled their expectations. He was slender, distinguished-looking, and wore with an air the jacket then belonging to the artillery service, which a deplorable mania for uniformity has since abolished. The first impression made by him was one of quiet strength and intellectual honesty. His forehead was that of a thinker, his nose straight and clean-cut, and his grayish blue eyes looked straight into the faces of his hearers. He spoke as one having authority, in a grave and somewhat harsh and monotonous voice, weighing his words and often using long sentences in order to make every point of his close argument quite clear.

"While ready to encourage discussion, he insisted on logical reasoning; he had a great regard both for logic and for mathematics, frequently employing mathematical terms; his discourse was not always easy to follow on account of its wealth of ideas and suggestions, but it repaid the closest attention, not only because of his keen insight into all branches of his subject, but because of his evident sincerity and conviction.

"At that time the college had on its staff men of distinguished mental gifts and also brilliant lecturers, but among them all Lieutenant-Colonel Foch seemed to his pupils to be the most original thinker and the most profound student; they followed his lectures with

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avidity and were conscious of the stimulus given to their minds by his own."

These lectures have been collected in two large volumes, to which we shall return later, as they contain the doctrine which he applied later with such conclusive success.

He left the Ecole de Guerre in 1900 and went to the 29th regiment of artillery, stationed at Laon. In 1903 he was promoted to the rank of colonel, going to the 35th artillery at Vannes. In 1905 he was appointed chief of staff of the Fifth Army Corps, then at Orléans; on the 20th of June, 1907, he was promoted to a brigadier-generalship and given a place on the General Staff of the whole army.

Just at that time Georges Clémenceau became premier. The Ecole de Guerre was not going on well; its administration was weak and undecided, owing to the deplorable introduction of politics into the army; it was absolutely necessary to find a new director capable of reorganizing the intellectual centre of our forces.

From several different sources Clémenceau heard that Foch, whom he did not know, was the man best qualified for the task. Clémenceau sent for him at once, and, in a few minutes, with characteristic bluntness, offered him the post.

"But, Mr. President," said Foch, "I'm afraid that you have not heard everything about me. Do you know that I have a brother who is a Jesuit?"

"I don't care a damn," said Clémenceau. "You





Foch (in the centre) and his brothers.



## HIS FAMILY AND HIS CAREER

will make a good director of the college, and that's all I care about."

This was the first meeting of these two men, who were to be thrown together ten years later under such tragic circumstances and to become the compellers of victory.

Foch was now director-in-chief of the college where he had been one of the most highly considered teachers; he had the power to plan and carry out a system of instruction according to his own very definite ideas, and could exercise a direct and stimulating influence over his professors and their pupils. He therefore proceeded to inculcate the doctrine which after long study and deep thought he had come to believe firmly.

The idea of possible war was ever present to his mind, and all his teaching was directed toward this possibility. His chief aim was to form leaders, men of initiative tempered by education, who would be equal to any circumstances, and to that end he formed the plan of a course of lectures on the higher strategy, to be followed for twelve supplementary months by the fifteen best pupils, in which they might become familiar with the more difficult problems of military science. This course, which he instituted in 1909, only lasted for a year, but Foch also originated what was known as the "Centre of Advanced Military Study," to which a certain number of lieutenant-colonels from every branch were sent for a course lasting nine months, and this has sometimes since been called "The School for Marshals."

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If we look over the names of officers who have followed these courses we shall find that most of them have had exceptionally brilliant careers during this war; they have risen rapidly from one grade to another, and have been called to commands of the utmost importance. General Weygand, for instance (he was only a lieutenant-colonel at the time of the mobilization), who has been Foch's most intimate and trusted fellow-worker during the war, not leaving him for a moment, and being to him what Berthier was to Napoleon, was one of the most remarkable pupils in this course.

In 1911 Foch was made a general of division, and left the Ecole de Guerre to take command of the Thirteenth Division at Chaumont.

On the 17th of December, 1912, he took command of the Eighth Army Corps at Bourges, and on August 23d, 1913, that of the Twentieth Corps at Nancy.

This last is a magnificent body of men, one of the best in our army. The training of the troops has been carried to the highest possible point, and the force always maintained at its full strength. The regiments have been ready to go into the field at a few hours' notice, to take a position covering other troops, and to hold back the German thrust, in case (as we were bound to foresee) the German staff should attempt a sudden attack intended to demoralize our mobilization and stun us by the violence of their first blow.

If the idea of war was always uppermost in Foch's mind while he was at the Ecole de Guerre, it dominated him still more now that he found himself at the head

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of this picked corps on the frontier where fighting must almost necessarily begin; he therefore brought all his energy and all his mental resources to bear on the difficulties which might at any moment confront him.

But on the 18th of July, 1914, the general left Nancy to spend a fortnight's leave of absence at his estate of Traoufeunteniou, in Brittany, accompanied by all his family, including his two sons-in-law, Captain Fournier, who was on the General Staff of the army, and Captain Bécourt, of the 26th Battalion of Chasseurs stationed at Pont-à-Mousson.

This is yet another proof, if more were needed, that France was not planning war. If the French Government had thought for an instant that the assassination at Serajevo would lead to such sinister consequences, the commander of one of our frontier corps would not have been allowed to go to the other end of France on a peaceable vacation.

A few days later the famous note of Austria to Serbia, which directly brought on the war, came like thunder out of a clear sky; the horizon grew rapidly darker, and on the 26th of July General Foch was summoned to return to Nancy with all speed.

## CHAPTER III

### HIS LECTURES AT THE ECOLE DE GUERRE

#### IS THERE A THEORY OF WAR?

HISTORY shows us that most of the great leaders of the past began by winning campaigns, and afterward, in some cases, they told us how and why. In other words, they began by practice, and ended by theory. The most celebrated instance of this is Napoleon, who, after having swept through Europe with his conquering army for twenty years, employed his enforced leisure at Saint Helena in going over some of the theories and principles which had guided him.

Foch, on the other hand, reversed this order; first, he taught the theory of warfare, and then later circumstances allowed him to carry out his theory in the field. His doctrine, as expounded in his lectures, brought him a deservedly high rating among professional soldiers, but that now seems insignificant compared with his present world-wide fame.

The first of the two volumes containing his lectures at the Ecole de Guerre was published in April, 1903; it comprises those which he gave in 1900, and its title is "The Principles of War"; the second, brought out in 1904, is called "The Conduct of War; Manœuvres in the Field." Into these books Foch condensed his theories of modern warfare, and it is worth while to ex-

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amine them at some length, because, on the one hand, this theorist was later to lead to victory the largest and most powerful armies ever controlled by one man, and, on the other, because his theories embody not only what he himself believed, but what has since become the creed of the French General Staff. Foch's appointment as director of the Ecole de Guerre, after having been one of its professors, naturally added to the prestige of his teaching, and, as we have said in the last chapter, the officers who helped to win the war were profoundly impressed, especially the younger ones, by what he taught them.

"The following pages, which were written for the guidance of young officers, may be compared to a bon-fire lighted on a dangerous coast to assist doubtful navigators. Let no one look for a complete, still less for an academic treatise on the art of war; this is simply a setting forth of some of the principal points concerning the handling of troops, and its chief object is to show that if a commander has the proper mental orientation he will always plan his manoeuvres in a rational manner."

These are the opening lines of Foch's preface, and it is easy to see that his mind is much taken up with the didactic and utilitarian side of his work. He intends, above all else, to lead his students in the right way; to saturate their minds with what seem to him the essential principles of war.

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But do these principles exist? Can the art of war really be taught? And if so, what should be the base of such teaching? To what faculty of the mind should it be addressed? With these questions Foch begins to outline his subject, and as he goes on those who read him attentively to-day cannot but be struck, first of all, by his talent for philosophic reasoning. His mind is both energetic and logical; one deduction follows another clearly and forcibly. He has a power of stating difficult propositions, of explaining the most complicated problems, which at times reminds one of Pascal, or the other writers of Port Royal. We may be sure that the great Arnaud, the author of "Logic, or the Art of Thought," would have delighted in these pages and would have discovered that he had a taste for strategy!

Certain military theorists, especially in the eighteenth century, says Foch, believed only in material strength. According to them, in order to conquer, it was necessary to have a larger number of men, better artillery and small arms, strong and well-chosen positions. These theories, although they appeared to be founded on mathematical principles, neglected one very important factor—Man, with his intellectual and moral faculties, and did not take into account what Jomini called "the impassioned and appalling drama" of war.

To use Foch's words: "It is as if in order to learn to ride you should merely walk around the pasteboard



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figure which represents a horse in the lecture-rooms, contenting yourself with taking it apart and putting it together again and learning the names and places of its different organs, without any experience of the gaits or temper of the living animal."

The Revolution and, above all, Napoleon showed the futility of any such cut-and-dried teaching. The soldiers of the Revolution and the Empire were neither more numerous nor better armed than their predecessors. They defeated the other armies of Europe because "owing to the ingenious combinations of their leader," their number was sufficient to turn the scale at critical moments and their daring, their discipline, and their skilled use of arms broke the enemy's morale.

Looked at from certain points of view, there is something about war that verges on the supernatural, and because of that element—(fate, chance, or whatever it may be called) some authorities hold that a great general cannot be made through instruction; either he is born with the divine spark of military genius, or he is not, and this is only to be determined on the field of battle.

Such a theory is the negation of effort and study and can only lead to idleness, carelessness, and a fatalism only suitable to the Oriental mind. It was believed by the Austrian staff in 1866, and by the French staff in 1870, with the result that both Austrians and French were beaten by the Prussians who had been under no such delusion, but had worked hard to learn all there was to be known about war.

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Foch inveighed continually against this theory of heaven-born genius, as may be seen by the following words:

"A battle-field does not give any opportunity for study; one does what he *can* to apply what he already *knows*, therefore, it is necessary that he should *know* thoroughly, and be able to use his knowledge quickly. The 'impassioned and appalling drama of war' is played by men who are led by other men, therefore, it is men themselves whom we must study in the pages of history. Accurate and extended historical knowledge is the basis of all military education; from it we may deduce the whole science of war, crystallized into dogmas which are the summing up of almost intangible truths, outside which lies heresy."

In other words, while a knowledge of history is not enough to make a great general, it is an essential part of his education. In this connection Foch quotes Dragomirow:

"History points out the masterpieces of warfare which are our examples, thus smoothing the way for those whom nature has gifted with military capacity. Knowledge based upon historical study gives confidence and the faculty of enlightened decision; it creates power to act and makes men of achievement."

War, according to Napoleon, was "a very simple art, with certain elementary rules:

Economy of forces.

Power to move them freely.

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Power to place them wherever needed.

Care to protect them.

"These rules," said Napoleon, "have guided the great captains whose mighty deeds live in history.

"By constant application, by untiring mental exercise, we must so imbue ourselves with these studies that they become an integral part of ourselves."

And Foch ends his statement by these counsels, which were a sort of catechism intended for the young officers who were his pupils:

"Happy are those among us who are born true believers, but they are few; nor do we not come into the world strong in mind or in body. Each one of us must slowly build up his faith, his convictions, his knowledge and his muscles. In the same way the result of your work here will not come as a sudden revelation, nor will your faculties develop from one day to the next; that is only to be obtained through untiring and continuous effort. Your studies throughout will make constant appeal to your reasoning powers. You will be expected later to be the brain of an army; my advice to you to-day is, therefore, *learn to think*. Consider each question clearly and separately, and ask yourselves what the gist of it is. By following that purely objective method you will get your bearings," and, in conclusion, Foch again quoted a saying of Napoleon's: "No genius inspires me, suddenly and secretly, with what I am to say or do in circumstances which others have not foreseen; it is the result of thought and meditation."

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## LEADERSHIP IN BATTLE

The main idea of the doctrine on which Foch always insists is that victory is born on the field of battle, and nowhere else. Until there is a pitched battle nothing can be settled; that once brought on, decision will follow the victorious arms, and every effort, material and moral, should be used to force this final test. This was also the doctrine of Napoleon, and Foch, carrying his idea farther, taught that war would tend to become more and more national, that it would be waged by more and more powerful armies, and that the human factor would become more and more dominant.

These premises once accepted, their logical development was a system of strategy having for its chief end a decisive battle, and employing manœuvres leading to that result—a strategy therefore of movement rather than inaction.

One of Napoleon's axioms was that the art of war consisted largely in having more men than your adversary at the point where you were to attack him, or where he wished to attack you, although your army might be smaller than his. This idea inspires and runs through all Foch's military theories, and may be traced in many of his lectures.

Bonaparte said to the Austrian generals gathered around him at Leoben: "There are many good generals in Europe, but they see too many things; I only see masses and I try to break them up, sure that,

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if I do, the smaller pieces will fall of themselves afterward."

It is a truism that in order to be able to command in war one must first have learned how to obey. A commander at the head of no matter what unit, a division, army corps, or army, receives an order from his superior officer. First of all he must understand it and confront it mentally, as a sportsman approaches the game he means to shoot, then draw on all the resources of his intelligence and of his character in order to carry it out by the most suitable means. It often happens that an order allows a certain freedom of action on the part of him who is to execute it, and nothing is more contrary to active and intelligent discipline than inert and rigid submission to a ready-made formula.

Foch gives a well-known example, that of General de Failly, who, while holding to the *letter* of the orders he had received, failed to carry them out through lack of intelligence and, above all, of character, as he shrank from accepting responsibility.

He hesitated, felt his way, and finally hindered his army corps from taking part in the battles of the 4th and 6th of August, 1870. And afterward, in the same war, in the fighting around Dijon, Garibaldi, as was proved later, did not really obey the orders given him. In this case the general seems to have been influenced by personal reasons, among them the desire to appear successful. Garibaldi and de Failly, said Foch, two chiefs of widely different origin, came to the same dis-

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astrous failure, and over the same path—want of intellectual discipline and forgetfulness of military duty in its true sense.

Foch closes by these lines: "The moral factor is the most important element in war; the will to conquer sweeps all before it. There is a psychological phenomenon in great battles which explains and determines their result. One hundred thousand men leave ten thousand of their number dead upon the ground and acknowledge themselves beaten; they retreat before the victors, who have lost as many men if not more. Neither one side nor the other knows, when they withdraw, what its own losses have been nor how heavy those of the opposing force, therefore, it is not on account of material damage, still less from any possible computation of figures, that the losers give up the struggle. As General Cardot says in a very keen analysis: 'Ninety thousand vanquished retire before ninety thousand victors, solely because they do not wish to fight any longer, and this reluctance is because they do not believe that they can win, and are therefore demoralized and unable to hold out any longer.' "

And again Foch quotes the celebrated saying of Joseph de Maistre: "'A lost battle is a battle which one believes lost; in a material sense no battle can be lost.' If defeat comes from moral causes, then victory may come from moral causes also, and one may say: 'A battle won is a battle which we will not acknowledge to be lost.'



Foch, captain of artillery.





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“As Frederick the Great was once passing an old château in Silesia he saw over the door a coat of arms on which a pair of fighting stags had locked horns, the motto being ‘The most obstinate wins. That is the true source of success!’ cried the master of war. And Marshal Bugeaud was in the habit of saying, ‘O moral power, thou art the queen of armies!’

“What compels victory is, above all else, the conduct of a commander. ‘Cæsar, and not the Roman legions, conquered Gaul,’ said Napoleon, and Rome trembled before Hannibal, not because of the Carthaginian soldiery.

“Important results in war are brought about by great leaders, and it is in the influence exerted by such a leader, in the enthusiasm which he inspires, that we must look for the explanation of the unconscious movements of the human mass in those impressive moments when, without knowing why, an army in the field feels itself carried forward as if sliding down an inclined plane.” Foch also attributes the utmost importance to good leadership. He teaches that a battle must not be left to work itself out; it must be directed, and will be lost or won according to the quality of such direction. There is no idea to which he holds more closely; no thesis on which he insists with more force. It is the essential doctrine which he wishes to ingrain into the minds of his students, as it represents the keystone of his teaching.

That a battle can be controlled by a commander has been, as we know, denied by Tolstoi in his celebrated

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novel, "War and Peace," a work which not only gives an admirable picture of war, with life-like sketches of the combatants, but also contains a theory as to military art. Tolstoi endeavors strenuously to prove, by means of examples taken from Napoleon's Russian campaign and especially from the famous battle of Borodino (which we French call Moskova), that there is no such thing as the control of a leader; that forces, once let loose, escape from guidance, and their action develops of itself, running a thousand risks, and subjected to a thousand accidents, being all the while entirely out of the commander's reach. Tolstoi gives in detail the series of orders issued by Napoleon, and tries to make us believe that they had no real influence over the progress of the conflict. On the one hand, he shows us Napoleon striking into the empty air, believing himself an actor in the scene while he is only a spectator, and on the other Koutousof, the Russian commander-in-chief, sleeping or reading novels, without attempting to take any part, being steeped in fatalism, and therefore quite convinced that his intervention would have no effect.

These opinions of Tolstoi, which could be easily proved to be wrong, bear the distinguishing mark of the Russian national spirit, which has been strikingly shown in the recent Russian revolution. Everything has happened according to Tolstoi's theories; human beings and events have been entirely left to themselves; no chief has had enough courage or strength of character to attempt any real leadership.

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Tolstoi, no matter how great a genius as a novelist, after all only dealt with fiction, but certain military theorists have committed themselves to theses which were very like his. They maintain that a battle is *anonymous*, so to speak, and have ransacked history for cases where, owing to some fortuitous happening, turned to account by those most closely concerned in it, a fight has had an entirely different result from that intended by their commander.

Foch disagrees with this doctrine vigorously, and shows its dangers. A battle, like everything else where human beings are concerned, is, of course, subject to accidents. A leader, no matter how gifted, may not be able to foresee and guard against all possibilities, and, if we dig deep enough into history, we may find such cases. But they are the exceptions that prove the rule, and on the whole the conduct of the chief must be the decisive factor.

General Cardot, whom Foch likes to quote, has said: "If you want to make away with your adversary, it is not necessary to cut off his arms and legs, to make a hole in his breast and split open his belly; a sword-thrust through the heart or a thump on the head with a club will do the business."

Victory largely depends upon a crushing blow dealt at a certain point. Napoleon formulated this when he said that in order to win one had only to be the stronger in a given place, at a given time. Clausewitz, the well-known German theorist, summed up the Napoleonic strategy thus: "In Napoleon's battles a veil

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seems to cover the tediousness inseparable from taking up positions and carrying out the first movements, but that once lifted, one always sees *the decisive attack by masses of men*, filling the scene with tragic fury."

When Napoleon explained his doctrine to Marshal Gouvion Saint Cyr, he said: "At the beginning of a battle one must be guided by circumstances. Toward the end of the day, when I see that the enemy is tired and has drawn upon the greater part of his resources, I gather together all my reserves in order to throw into the field *a great mass* of infantry, cavalry, and artillery; thanks to the fall of this mass upon an enemy who did not foresee it, I cause an *event*, and by this means victory is almost always won."

These words, which condense all the Napoleonic strategy into a formula, are worth remembering; one feels Foch's mind to have been so permeated by them that they influenced his doctrine throughout.

He gives the striking illustration of Macdonald's column at Wagram, following that "tragic incident" step by step. "The attack of the column was prepared by a charge of forty squadrons to clear a place for it, and also by a cannonade from a hundred guns to disturb the adversary, and was carried out by fifty massed battalions (22,500 men). This mass of infantry was powerless to bring its fire to bear on account of its formation; a bayonet charge would have been useless, because there was no enemy to receive it, therefore the column inflicted no *material* damage

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on the enemy, while itself suffering very heavy losses. When it reached its objective, Süssenbrunn, it was reduced to fifteen hundred men, and yet it had so shaken the enemy's morale that he was routed. This apparent sacrifice was the cause of a decisive and overwhelming victory. In a final analysis one sees, therefore, the troops which are cut to pieces get the upper hand of those by whom they are apparently destroyed; can there be a more striking proof of the truth that victory is the outcome of *moral* not *material*, forces?"

This is the culminating point of Foch's doctrine, the dominant idea which runs, like a *leit motiv*, through all his lectures. We shall see later that it was the soul of his strategy in the campaign of 1918, during the great battles of the Marne, the Yser, and the Somme.

### A CONCRETE STUDY—THE WAR OF 1870-71— STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS OF THE GERMAN STAFF

In his first book on "The Principles of War," Foch gives his theories on warfare; in the second, "The Conduct of War; Manœuvres in the Field," he applies them to a concrete example—the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71.

He says: "In order to keep the brain of an army in time of peace constantly occupied with the problems of a possible war, there is nothing more useful than to consult the pages of history; therefore, we must not hesitate to look back at our painful experiences in 1870." And he ends his preface with these words:

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*"In memoriam, in spem—after sad remembrance, the hope of better days."*

The immediate causes of that war are summed up by Foch with his usual luminous accuracy; the spark which set fire to the tinder was kindled at the celebrated interview on the 13th of July, 1870, of which we have a cynical account from Bismarck himself.

Moltke, Roon, and Bismarck were lunching together at Ems, and speaking of the war for which they were impatiently waiting, when a telegram from the King was brought in, very reassuring as to the prospect of peace. The despatch was read and Bismarck says that "Roon and Moltke dropped their knives and forks by the same impulse. We were all profoundly depressed and had the feeling that the whole affair would come to nothing. I then put this question to Moltke: 'The tool which we need most is our army; is it really so good that we might go into the war with a strong probability of winning it?'

"His answer was: 'We have never had a better instrument,' and Roon (in whom, to be sure, I had less confidence) fully confirmed him.

"'Very well then!' I said to my two fellow guests, 'go on quietly with your luncheon. I sat down at a round marble-topped table which was beside the one at which we were eating, and read the telegram over again carefully. Then I took my pencil and deliberately struck out all the passage which stated that Benedetti had asked for another audience, leaving only the beginning and end of the message, which gave

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it quite another meaning. When I read the version I had just made to Moltke and Roon they both cried: 'Splendid! that is sure to produce an effect'—and we went on eating with better appetites. Every one knows what followed."

And Foch adds: "This story needs no comment."

The war was thus forced upon us by Prussia, who had been getting ready for it for a long time. Moltke planned it out, down to the smallest detail; he foresaw that German forces would concentrate and considered them better than ours. As soon as he had them under control he decided to attack, for profound study of Napoleon's offensive campaigns was the foundation of German strategy.

Moltke divided his troops into four armies, three being intended for immediate action and the fourth, made up of two army corps, being held in reserve before Mayence.

Foch, as an impartial historian, shows the advantages of this strategical plan: "Looked at merely from the point of view of the result which he sought to obtain, it is as exact as a mathematical problem, and yet broad and simple."

But his clear-sighted eye saw also its defects, and he was not carried away by unreasoning admiration. Compared with Napoleon's strategy (that of 1806, for instance, which ended in the battle of Jena), its inferiority is clearly to be seen. The reason is that Napoleon, while carrying on an offensive also prepared to defend himself in case his foe should take the initia-

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tive and attack him. The concentration of his troops was therefore defensive in the beginning, and openly offensive at the end. Moltke, however, whose every faculty was absorbed by his wish to attack, took no strategic measures to insure his safety, and if he had found himself confronted by an energetic adversary, this neglect must have cost him dear.

He had only one cavalry corps to cover the front of his army by scouting, supported by a division of infantry several days' march behind.

"As a means of obtaining information," says Foch, "this cavalry corps was of undeniable value, but it was not strong enough to offer any substantial resistance." As a result of this error in judgment, Moltke was insufficiently acquainted with the enemy's movements, and also, in default of proper protection, he was exposed to a sudden attack before he could get all his forces together.

As they had not proper strategic guidance his troops went from one surprise to another. They met the enemy and engaged him, without knowing clearly what they were doing nor why, nor did they ever know with any certainty the number of their opponents. Not the commander-in-chief, but the officers in charge of the troops directed the battles. That was a fundamental error, and, as the war went on, its consequences were plainly seen; the campaign finally ended in an improvised battle, which had not been anticipated, and which it was impossible to lead. If the Germans had faced an energetic adversary, they must, according to Foch, inevitably have been defeated.



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How infinitely superior was Napoleon's strategy, which allowed him to strike how and when he chose, knowing always just what he meant to do!

The difference between Napoleon and Moltke is that one was a genius, supreme in his art, the other a careful and thoughtful scholar.

Most fortunately for the German commander, he had to do with a French staff which had neither foreseen, studied, nor prepared. The strategic plan of our staff—if it can be said to have had one—consisted in devising “a march through southern Germany which would take a month,” to unite with an Austrian army which was eventually to be raised in Bohemia.

To undertake crossing the whole of hostile Germany in order to clasp hands with doubtful allies was foolhardy, unless the problem had been worked out beforehand, our sluggish adversary defeated, and victory already in our grasp. This proposition was therefore the height of ignorance, or the height of irony—in either case, the French General Staff accepted it as the basis of their plan of operations.

But as a visionary plan seldom allows of practical preparation, none whatever was made. When the moment arrived for carrying the project out, the inadequacy of our railways absolutely prevented concentration of the army and obliged us to scatter our troops; one part was massed in Lorraine, another in Alsace, separated by the Vosges, while a third army was held in reserve at the camp of Châlons.

The staff had looked forward to sending part of our navy to the shores of the Baltic, at the same time

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as the invasion of Germany; to this end a corps of 30,000 men was organized, made up of marines and a division which had been left at Toulon. That was another grave error, and would have meant a deplorable weakening of our available forces, but it was soon found that the navy, also entirely unprepared, was not in condition to undertake any important transportation.

When it came to the question of bringing together the armies in Alsace and Lorraine, the defects in our organization became more and more apparent; all the services, commissariat and supplies, ambulances, trains and convoys, went to pieces at the same time, and the reserves were unable to rejoin when they were expected. The fantastic invasion of Germany was heard of no more.

(It will be seen that Foch, after pointing out the mistakes of the German staff, is equally severe upon those made by ours.)

For lack of a judicious and intelligent plan, for lack of serious and methodical preparation, the French were obliged to remain on the defensive and await the enemy's attack.

Once concentrated, the German armies moved forward to the attack. The First Army was commanded by Steinmetz. He was seventy-four years of age, an old soldier of the struggles for independence, but still active and vigorous; in the war with Austria, in 1866, he was conspicuous by his indomitable energy and his

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willingness to take the initiative. (His nickname later was "The Lion of Nachod.") An untiring worker, as hard on himself as he was on others, he was difficult to get on with, as he was suspicious and irascible, which naturally complicated his relations with his superior officers as well as with his subordinates.

Moltke and he seldom saw matters in the same light, and consequently their opinions frequently clashed; there was, in fact, no real understanding between the German General Staff and that of the First Army. This lack of co-ordination, which might have had serious consequences, soon showed itself plainly. One of the first battles, that of Spicheren, fought on August 6th, 1870, was started by a division commander, General von Kamecké, who took upon himself to provoke a fight which was sure to engage a corps and might involve the whole army. He gave the order to attack when he could only count on six battalions, as his second brigade had not yet come up; he also omitted to give any information to the columns next his as to what he meant to do.

This series of blunders committed by a subordinate cannot be too severely criticized, as such neglect of discipline must necessarily lead to practical negation of any supreme authority. If each executive officer allows himself to decide when and how a battle shall be fought, without waiting for orders from his superiors, there can be no unity of command, no supervision of operations as a whole.

But, after making this criticism, Foch judiciously

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forbids the inference that subordinates should be allowed no freedom of action whatever; some of Napoleon's generals were remarkable for their initiative and power to plan an offensive, but their energy was tempered by a due regard for discipline. Instead of being completely independent, as the majority of the German commanders were in 1870, they were proud of being intimately associated with the plans and decisions of their great chief, and carried them out with the utmost loyalty. Instances of this are too many to count, but one of the most conspicuous is that of Marshal Lannes, in 1806, just before the battle of Jena. (He was then in command of the Fifth Corps of the French army.)

When he arrived at Jena, on the 12th of October, he found it occupied by a force of about 15,000 men. His artillery fired a few shots, the enemy promptly retreated, and Lannes entered the city, throwing out a vanguard toward Weimar in the direction which the enemy had taken.

Then the young marshal (he was only thirty-eight) sent an immediate report to the Emperor.

"I do not know," he said, "whether the Prussians mean to fight us or to withdraw. I shall send out a reconnoitring party to find where they are.

"I should like to know whether Your Majesty wishes me to take my corps on to Weimar; I do not dare to give this order in case Your Majesty should wish to give me other directions," and he adds a postscript: "I have just heard the result of the reconnaissance.

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The enemy has a camp of thirty thousand men one league<sup>1</sup> from here, on the road to Weimar; very possibly they may want to fight us."

Napoleon received the report at three o'clock in the afternoon, and at once ordered the Fourth and Sixth Corps of the Guard, and several divisions of cavalry to be concentrated at Jena, where he joined Lannes on the Landgrafenberg. During the night the whole of the Grand Army came up, while the Fifth Corps, a silent and motionless vanguard, with no betraying campfires, was on the watch for the enemy. The next day the Prussian army was routed at the battle of Jena.

If Marshal Lannes had launched his force blindly against the retreating foe, complete victory would not have been ours; his behavior was that of a model executive officer, and is forever worthy of imitation.

Foch asks us to imagine those same men at the head of the German troops in 1870. Their conduct would have been very different from that of the Germans then, and there is not the least doubt that they would have obtained a decisive result after the first battles.

"I must repeat," he says, "that the art of war for officers of the highest rank, and also for those who are in command of an advance, is not to rush upon the enemy like wild boars; in order to make a military combination effective, there must be understanding and consultation with, and also obedience to one chief, who does not confine himself to making plans, but

<sup>1</sup> Two and one-half miles.

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sees that they are carried out. What would be thought of the leader of an orchestra who, after giving out the piece of music to be played, should stay far back, behind his musicians, leaving them to play singly or together, according to their fancy?"

That is what Moltke did in 1870. Although the first plan was his, he did not direct the war in any true sense of the word, and it is interesting to notice his attitude regarding the action taken by his executive officers which, in many cases, amounted to disobedience. He systematically refrained from any adverse comment on what had been done, or from finding fault with those who were responsible; when a movement had been made he took it as a foundation for new combinations; he covered the mistakes of his subordinates with the cloak of his authority and encouraged them to go on still further.

Victory was not due to his plans, for they were seldom followed; it was usually the result of movements improvised in the field by his subordinates. Such a method (or want of it) cannot lead to a great strategical success, but it has its merits when carried out by energetic men, especially if they are opposed by an inert adversary, and in 1870 the French had one characteristic in common—complete passivity. They never moved without definite orders from higher authority, and carried them out to the letter without regard to their spirit; the natural consequence being that, when any situation arose which had not been foreseen and provided for, the men who should have been leaders

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were completely bewildered. While the German generals threw themselves boldly into a fight, sure of backing from the forces on their right or left, the French seemed to be timid and doubtful as to the chance of any outside help.

"Confronted only by this passive and lifeless opposition, the German attack, although irregular and badly controlled, was bound to succeed. Victory will always go to those who deserve her through having stronger will and higher intelligence than others."

Foch continues his instructive comparison between Napoleon's strategy and that of Moltke in 1870. After their first success on the Saar the Germans halted instead of following up their advantage, because their high command was forced to pause in order to regain close touch with the army, which had been lost during the rush of unforeseen events.

"Does not that prove," says Foch, "that if a tool is too heavy for the worker's hand it will either slip through his fingers or pull him over?" And he proceeds to give, by a keen analysis of the mental methods of the German staff, an explanation of their inferiority.

Moltke was a theoretical strategist; he believed in deduction, and based his plans on intelligent suppositions, which he then followed out logically, without making allowance for conditions which cannot be foreseen—a mental process which has been summed up by Von der Goltz in a well-known sentence: "Do not an enemy's methods of reasoning afford the firmest foundation for our own calculations?"

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This system, adopted by the German staff, has the defect of substituting a fixed construction for ever-changing realities. Nothing is more complex, more capricious, and less logical than war. To decide that a general will move in a certain direction because such a course is sensible is to ignore a thousand accidents which may happen at any time, not to mention that what looks sensible to one man may not appear so to another.

Boileau has said: "Truth may sometimes seem improbable," but, on the other hand, in war as in life what seems probable may often not be true. Instead of making plans for the enemy, which is what the German method amounts to, it is wiser to ascertain, by means of vigilant observation and a competent intelligence service, where he is and what he is likely to do. That was Napoleon's way.

Still following the campaign of 1870, Foch shows that, up to the time of the battles around Metz, the German staff, instead of trying to find the actual positions of the French army, persisted in following their own pre-conceived ideas, which seldom tallied with the facts.

For instance, they believed the French to be falling back toward Verdun while they were still close to Metz; the chances were therefore against the Germans when the fighting began, and they must have been beaten had their enemy not been sluggish and badly led.

The executive officers, the heads of army corps and



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divisions, were worth infinitely more than their commander-in-chief, for they had the true military spirit; they were willing to attack, to take fighting chances, and accept responsibility, and they turned what should have been defeat into victory.

The fighting around Metz decided the fate of the war, and the names of Gravelotte and Saint Privat must always sound like a knell in French ears. Foch tells the story of those grim days in a manner which is a model of clearness, exactness, and psychological insight. He follows Moltke hour by hour and step by step, showing how he held to his illusions and was always in the clouds because he insisted on substituting hypotheses for facts. He went into the decisive battle with many chances against him; he was ill-informed as to the position and plans of the enemy, and his forces were scattered instead of being concentrated. On the morning of the 18th of August (the day of the battle of Saint Privat), the Great General Headquarters and the headquarters of the First and Second Armies were not in touch with each other; they were, says Foch, "swathed in a dense fog," each acting as its staff thought best, and carrying out different orders—which does not argue a model high command.

What a striking contrast to this slipshod conduct of war is that of Napoleon, who faced facts instead of being misled by probabilities! He was not only a deep student of the science of war, but also capable of making decisions on the field of battle, suiting them

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to the course of events. He was always on his guard, like a master of fence, changing his thrusts and parries to meet his adversary's play.

Notwithstanding the inferior strategy of the German staff compared to that of Napoleon, important and decisive battles were won by their army, and having made clear the defects of their system, Foch proceeds to dwell on its good points. Thanks to the teachings of the staff, all Prussian officers had a sane and definite understanding of war. They knew that the scale of its fortune turns in battle; they were taught how to fight, and were also made to work hard, in untiring preparation for the conflict which was sure to come sooner or later. Every branch of the army was kept up to a high standard of efficiency, while Napoleon's teaching and example were earnestly studied and methodically developed, especially his use of masses of men.

The result was, as Foch said, "machine made," but the machine was gigantic; the war was not won through the genius of Moltke, but by the whole Prussian army, which was his creation.

Heine, who knew his fellow countrymen well, could not resist turning their mania for method into ridicule:

*"Zu fragmentärisch ist Welt und Leben—  
Ich will mich zum deutschen Professor begeben;  
Der weiss das Leben zusammenzusetzen  
Und er macht ein verständlich System daraus;  
Mit seinem Nachtmützen und Schlafrocksetzen  
Stopft er die Lücken des Weltenhaus."*

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*"Too fragmentary are life and the world—  
I will betake me to a German professor  
Who will know how to put life together again  
And make it into an intelligible system.  
With his nightcap and his dressing-gown  
He can stop the holes in our house, the world."*

The strategist who clings to his own ideas as to the conduct of a campaign, without allowing for the unexpected, is like the German professor with his "intelligible system," stopping the holes in our world with his nightcap and dressing-gown.

This professorial pedantry has survived Heine's mockery, and what may be called professorial strategy was found again in the German staff during the war which has just come to an end.

After their victory at Charleroi and during the fighting on the frontier, the Germans saw the French army not as it really was, but as they supposed it to be; they imagined it demoralized and unable to withstand the shock of another great battle. As they thought us beaten beforehand, they did not consider it necessary to take any steps to inform or to protect themselves; they had only one simple plan—to rush forward at full speed, hurl themselves upon our troops, and throw them into confusion.

If the staff had taken the trouble to find out the truth, their self-confidence might have been shaken. Far from being demoralized, whenever it was necessary for our army to stop its retreat and turn on the enemy, it was capable of dealing a staggering blow, as at

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Guise, when a portion of the Fifth Army routed the Prussian guard and held the ground they had won. In the same manner the Moroccan Division, on the 28th of August, thrashed an entire Saxon army corps at Fosse-à-l'Eau, near Signy l'Abbaye.

These were facts which leaders worthy of the name should have made it their business to know, but our foes had the blindness of those who will not see; each of their armies pressed forward as fast as it could go, with von Kluck's, which was the most powerful, forming an enveloping wing on the extreme right. His force, made up of picked corps, had fought and suffered heavily at Charleroi, notwithstanding which, he thrust it forward, in stifling heat, the men marching, on an average, forty kilometres a day. The intrenched camp of Paris lay to the right; von Kluck seems not to have known how many troops were held there, but in any case he should have protected himself against possible grave menace from that quarter. Instead of doing so he only left one corps on his right, and continued his headlong race toward the southeast in pursuit of the English and French armies, which he hoped to surround.

Suddenly he found himself in danger; his right flank was likely to be turned. Maunoury's army, of which he had not known, or had despised, threw itself fiercely against the only corps left behind, and forced it back. There was no time to be lost; von Kluck hastily recrossed the Marne with part of his troops and attacked Maunoury.

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But it was robbing Peter to pay Paul, for the English army, now only opposed by an inferior force, advanced quickly, and von Kluck found himself wedged between huge pincers which threatened to close on him. In vain he attempted, by repeated blows, to make Maunoury give way, and at last, after four days' desperate fighting, he was forced to withdraw his discouraged and exhausted troops as rapidly as possible in order to escape disaster.

That was the beginning of the German defeat.

Thus we see that in 1914, as in 1870, the German staff went into a battle which was meant to be decisive under unfavorable conditions, and this, again, because they did not see the enemy's army as it really was—in the latter case nine-tenths intact instead of being, as they supposed, already half demolished. They should have known how strong we still were, and their first duty should have been to bring up all their available forces before delivering an attack. An army corps or even a division more or less may, in a close battle, make the difference between victory and defeat, and vice versa. This was true of the battle of the Marne, where for several days the equilibrium was so unstable that a few more troops might have turned the day against us. But the German staff had made the gross mistake of sending, toward the end of August, a whole corps to the eastern front, because the Russian advance had frightened the great Junker landowners (who objected to having their estates overrun), although the Russian movement was not very

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serious—it is a long way from eastern Prussia to Berlin. Since it had been decided that the first necessity was to crush the principal enemy, France, nothing should have been allowed to interfere with this plan or deplete the means by which it was to be carried out. The staff made a further blunder by undertaking another secondary action, the siege of Antwerp, as that took away important forces—an army corps at least—which should have been used in the great battle.

Nothing is more interesting and more instructive than to study the war of 1870 in the brains, so to speak, of the men who engineered it. Foch remembers the saying of Yorck of Würtemberg, that “the key of military history is kept at headquarters,” and it is partly because he had made such an intensive study of the German military mind, especially as shown in the campaign of 1870, that he was able later to look into his adversary’s hand and foresee his game. Knowledge had become almost divination, and at the battles of the Marne and the Yser this fortunate combination of native genius and capacity for patient study served him admirably.

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His ideas regarding strategy may be summed up in a few sentences.

The art of war, like all other arts known to man, demands diligent and untiring work, and requires an amount of technical skill which can only be attained

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by constant effort. The moral forces of an army are even more valuable than its material resources; their part becomes increasingly important as war becomes more and more an affair of nations, dealing with the vital interests, and even with the existence, of whole peoples.

Foch is a fervent idealist, believing in God and in the immortality of the soul. He holds that the faith and devotion of an individual to an ideal beyond his reach, bestows on him irresistible strength.

In the conduct of war, the power of the commander-in-chief should be supreme, but the efficiency of an army depends upon that of its generals—if they are incompetent it is but a soulless body.

The struggle once fairly started, every effort should be made to bring on the decisive battle; seeking to evade it will be worse than useless; the issue must be sternly faced. The chief ought to be able to go into the fight with the greatest possible number of troops, and all his efforts should be directed toward that end. In every great battle there is a crucial moment at which a knock-down blow should be dealt, and if it is to be definitive it must be carefully prepared for.

As it is not possible to know all an adversary's plans, an army should not be handled according to a system based on pre-conceived theories. A strategic situation changes like the changing sea; the first duty of the chief is therefore to watch for those changes and even anticipate them. He must never lose sight of his adversary; by careful observation he may surprise the

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secret of hostile movements, and in consequence modify his own designs. This untiring watchfulness is indispensable to military success.

### A MODEL BATTLE

In the art of war, as in every other, precepts and theories are more useful when illustrated by examples.

After having impressed his pupils with the importance of profound study, and explained to them his conception of the part which should be played by a leader, Foch sought, among the vast accumulations of his military research, for some one battle to serve as a concrete instance of the perfection of generalship.

He found it in the battle of Saafeld, a victory over the Prussians won by Marshal Lannes in 1806, at the beginning of the astounding campaign which had its ending on the field of Jena.

The story, as told by him to his class, is a marvel of historical narrative. One feels that he made it "con amore" for the reason that Saafeld, although not in itself of great importance, showed that Lannes had displayed there qualities which were not only rare and valuable, but eminently French.

On the 9th of October, 1806, the Grand Army, divided into three columns, was crossing the Frankensteinwald on its way into Saxony; the Fifth Corps, with Lannes in command, was at the head of the left column. After a long and hard march from Coburg he had just



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arrived at Gräfenthal with Suchet's division and his cavalry; his Second Division was seven kilometres to the rear.

Napoleon's orders to him covered three different possibilities:

- 1st.—If the enemy was not more than fifteen or eighteen thousand strong he was to call up the Seventh Corps (Augereau's) from the rear, and make a combined attack.
- 2d.—If the enemy, having concentrated a superior force at Saafeld, should himself attack, Lannes was to hold his ground until the Emperor had time to come up in strength.
- 3d.—If the enemy, pressing his attack, did not allow time for help to intervene, Lannes was to fall back on Gräfenthal.

Lannes was careful to keep in constant communication with Napoleon, sending him despatches three times a day, with minute reports as to his own position, and also that of the enemy. His liaison service (always of the utmost importance) was admirably organized.

The marshal went forward with his corps, throwing out one column to protect his advance—and here Foch draws a little military picture in a few strokes:

"It was just before daylight on a fresh and bracing autumn morning, and the men started gayly, although their knapsacks were heavy with three days'

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rations. It was the Grand Army swinging along at the height of its power and glory; old marching songs ran through the column and new ones had been made for the new war.

"At the first halt the Emperor's proclamations were read to the troops, and shouts of 'Vive l'Empereur' from a thousand throats echoed in the farthest depths of the usually silent gorges. Then the march went on again, even more briskly than before.

"At the head of his troops rode their brilliant commander, a marshal of France at thirty-seven years of age, the victor of Montebello, an incarnation of energy and decision, and withal a model of prudence and moderation. Napoleon, who knew men well, said of him: 'He was both audacious and prudent in face of the enemy, and his presence of mind never failed him. He owed little to education, but nature had been lavish in her gifts. Among all the generals of the French army he stood unequalled for his power of handling a force of twenty-five thousand infantry in the field.'"

This sketch brings the scene and its actors before our eyes.

As they came out of the wood, the troops caught sight of the enemy's army drawn up in three straight lines at the foot of the sloping ground outside Saafeld. It was the division of Prince Louis of Prussia, and apparently six or seven thousand strong.

Lannes found himself faced by Napoleon's first possibility, and made up his mind to attack.

How did he set about it?

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The position of the Prussians showed that the French were expected to advance on Saafeld, as that town was a *geographical objective*, being the centre of many roads, and therefore a base for food-supplies.

The Prussians reasoned then as now, on a priori grounds, that the enemy must necessarily do this or that, because it was logical that he should, but the French, imbued with the sound military doctrines of the Revolution and the Empire, did not trouble themselves about geographical objectives; there was only one thing of consequence to them—to win the battle.

Where should the fight begin? A glance over the field showed Lannes that it would be to his advantage to attack on the left, as the ground there was steep and the approaches narrow, offering a favorable terrain for manœuvres.

It was then ten o'clock in the morning; the infantry columns were coming up well, but it would be three or four hours before all his forces could be concentrated, and during that time the enemy might take the initiative and fall upon his columns as they emerged from the wood. It was important to stop that, by occupying the high ground in certain places.

The enemy might also change his position, and by manœuvring take up another which would interfere with the marshal's plan; the best way to prevent that was to distract his attention by attacking him at several points simultaneously, using only a small force; to that end swarms of skirmishers were sent into the gardens and sunken roads.

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By this means Lannes knew exactly where the enemy was, and kept him occupied; that was what Napoleon meant by saying: "One should attack everywhere."

This was the first act of the marshal's programme; by one o'clock most of his troops had come up and were in their assigned places.

What were the Prussians doing meanwhile?

Prince Louis, who was brave, impetuous, and willing to take risks, decided about one o'clock that he would attack, and advanced straight ahead with six out of his twelve battalions, all he had available.

As soon as his column showed itself, it was riddled on the right by the fire of the French skirmishers and sharpshooters; the line wavered, stopped, and answered by volley firing; at that moment two French battalions with beating drums, led by General Suchet, fell upon its flank at the charge, throwing it into confusion.

By two o'clock the marshal's plan was ripe; all his troops had come up, the enemy's position was well known, and the morale of part of his force badly shaken; the time had come for a decisive blow. Lannes meant to strike with almost his full strength; one brigade was to advance upon the Prussian front, while another attacked its flank.

At three o'clock the manœuvre took place for which he had been working since morning. Bugles sounded and drums beat the charge all along the French line,

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and the Prussians, already under a heavy fire of grape-shot, saw "masses of infantry pouring down from the higher ground and rushing like a furious torrent upon their battalions, which were driven in on themselves instantly." <sup>1</sup>

Prince Louis, seeing his infantry thus demolished, hurried to his cavalry squadrons and charged at their head. He encountered the Tenth French Hussars, and one of their sergeants, named Guindet, pressed him hard, calling on him to surrender. He answered by a sabre thrust, whereupon Sergeant Guindet ran him through the body, killing him on the spot.

Foch calls attention to the skill shown by the young marshal: "One does not know which to admire more, the intelligent patience of his combinations during six hours, or the brilliancy of his final attack at the critical moment. His example is a proof that the art of war, even when leaders are most ardent and energetic and have the best possible troops at their disposal, does not allow of falling upon the enemy without due preparation."

"Tell me your friends, and by them I shall know you."

I have dwelt upon this example of Foch's because it gives us his ideal of a well-organized battle, and his opinion of the part to be played by a real leader.

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Baron Marbot.*

## FOCH

Among the splendid galaxy of Napoleon's generals he chose as an example for his pupils not the most glorious, but one of the most painstaking. Prudence is by no means to exclude daring—what Foch strove to inculcate was what he calls "intelligent audacity."

## CHAPTER IV

### IN COMMAND OF THE TWENTIETH ARMY CORPS

WE have seen Foch as a theorist; we shall now see how he works out his theories in one important command after another.

The strategic plan of the German staff for its offensive against France was, as we all know, to throw the great body of her troops across Belgium, to submerge the whole of our left wing by a vast enveloping movement, to reach our frontier where we were unprotected by fortresses, and then to push on by the most direct roads to Paris. The principal attack by the German right wing was to be supported by another, made to the east of Nancy, passing through the defile in the Vosges known as the Trouée des Charmes. When these two offensives met the French armies would be caught by huge pincers, thus illustrating the celebrated theory of the great German strategist, von Schlieffen.

Of course, the plan entailed the violation of Belgian neutrality, a crime which the Germans did not for a moment hesitate to commit, as they were sure it would be justified by their rapid and overwhelming success.

Although the French staff had for a long time had warning that such an invasion was possible in case of war, its officers could not at first believe that the enveloping movement would be of such magnitude; they

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thought the Meuse would be the extreme limit of its spread, as they doubted the German forces being strong enough to work effectively on the right bank of the river.

Imperfect knowledge of the German resources, caused by gaps in our intelligence department, was in a great degree responsible for the ignorance that cost us dear.

Our enemy had so perfected his military system, that from the very first days of the campaign there was an army corps in reserve behind every corps in active service, and the reserve corps were fully prepared to take the field almost at once.

When we consider the breadth of the flood that poured over Belgium, we must acknowledge that the French troops were concentrated much too far to the eastward. Our northern frontier, where the Germans were rapidly assembling masses of their best-trained men, had been left almost bare, but our staff, instead of changing the entire plan of concentration, were satisfied to make an alteration which had been thought of when the invasion of Belgium was discussed as a future possibility. The Fourth Army, under General Langle de Cary, which was originally in reserve, was put between our Third and Fifth Armies; the Fifth, commanded by General Lanrezac, had been near Charleville, and was now ordered to bear to the left, toward the northwest.

Our staff planned an offensive to be carried out in Alsace and Lorraine by the First and Second Armies,



## THE TWENTIETH ARMY CORPS

which formed our right wing, in order to hold a large number of German troops there, while, at the same time, the armies of our centre (the Third and Fourth) were to push vigorously across the Ardennes and Belgian Luxembourg and fall upon the flank of the German armies as they were carrying out their converging movement.

Our left wing (the Fifth Army) was to join forces with the British and the Belgians, and pushing straight ahead, endeavor to surprise the other German army, which was still sweeping onward like an irresistible force of nature.

The wisdom of this plan, which called for a general offensive on all the fronts at the same time, may well be questioned.

Even with the support of the British army, then very small, our forces were numerically far inferior to those of Germany, while we were not well provided with heavy artillery and lacked much necessary equipment.

The theory of such action was entirely contrary to that taught by Foch at the Ecole de Guerre. He had insisted that before taking an adventurous and perhaps hazardous step, it was the part of prudence to find out the enemy's intentions; it was also wise not to scatter forces too widely, but to keep the greater part under control in order to be able, at the proper time, to launch the "mass," as Napoleon called it, with decisive effect.

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The fact is, that in the years which immediately preceded the war there had been a marked reaction against his theories.

Influenced by some young and impetuous officers, the staff was possessed by the idea that the right way to make war was to push forward with all one's strength, and as hard as one could go, without thinking much about the nature of the ground or the numbers of the enemy.

Under widely differing conditions, therefore, and with decidedly opposite points of view, the German and French armies met in what has been called "the battle of the frontiers."

As we have seen before, when the war broke out, Foch was at Nancy in command of the Twentieth Corps, which was part of the Second Army led by General de Castelnau; the Third Army, with General Dubail at its head, was on the right of the Second.

The business of the Second Army was to see that no harm came to Nancy; the safety of the city provided for, Castelnau was to move toward the east, then turn northward, take up a position parallel with the First Army, and attack on the Dieuze front (Château-Salins), leaving a flanking guard facing Metz. This movement was therefore defensive and offensive at the same time. The offensive came to nothing, but the protection of Nancy was eminently successful, and the jewel city of eastern France remained untouched.

The Second Army originally comprised five corps,

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three reserve divisions and two divisions of cavalry, but a division and a half were moved elsewhere, so Castelnau was obliged to attack with approximately three corps, more or less.

In 1914, part of Lorraine belonged to France, and part had been seized by Germany after the war of 1870. German Lorraine, where the first fighting in that region began, is a high plateau with occasional hills, or côtes; there is the côte de Delme and the côte de Dieuze, which latter shuts off the region of the Etangs, or pools (there are about forty), and then comes the valley of the Saar.

There was no serious fighting in French Lorraine before the 20th of August. Two ranges of hills, running almost parallel, form a natural barrier before Nancy; one of these ranges, the Grand Couronné, is a long series of hillocks (Mont Toulon, Sainte G  n  vi  ve, Mont d'Ambance, and le Remb  tant) which make an imperfect half-circle between the Moselle and the Meurthe.

The Second Army found itself faced by four German corps and two divisions of cavalry, picked from among the best in their army, and after August 15th these were reinforced by a body of reserves.

On our side, the Twentieth was one of our crack corps, and from the first week of the war it was assigned to what is known as "covering duty," which Foch carried out admirably. On the 1st and 2d of August, our troops, in obedience to orders, kept themselves ten kilometres back from the frontier, a measure

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decided upon by the government in order to avoid any possible accident, as the Germans would surely have then declared us to be the aggressors.

This measure, which has been sharply criticised, had its drawbacks from a military point of view, although these have been exaggerated. It is, however, certain that we were obliged later to sacrifice lives in order to gain positions among the Vosges which we might have held in the beginning without striking a blow, but, on the other hand, the order had fortunate results from a political and diplomatic point of view, as it established before all the world that France had not intended to bring on the war. It was especially useful in England, as it proved to the statesmen who were opposed to immediate intervention that France, having exhausted every means of conciliation, had only defended herself when forced to do so, and the Germans, unable to say that we had attacked them on our frontiers, had to fall back on absurd pretexts, such as the myth of the bombardment of Nuremberg by French aviators—a fabrication which neither they nor any one else believed.

Lorraine, for centuries the battle-ground of French and German armies, was fairly vibrating with intense but repressed enthusiasm in the first days of that memorable August. Nancy, her lovely capital, was unprovided with permanent defenses, yet she watched the approach of war without either fear or astonishment, for her position as a frontier city had enabled her to see clearly that her neighbor's views were tend-

## THE TWENTIETH ARMY CORPS

ing more and more toward a war which should bring about Pan-Germany.

On the 3d of August a German patrol, profiting by our *diplomatic withdrawal* from the frontier, invaded French territory as far as the villages of Vaucourt, Xousse, and Remoncourt, but it was not until the next day that our covering troops (the Twentieth Corps) went forward, throwing out an advance-guard as far as the frontier through the forest of Parroy and along the valleys of the Seille and the Loutre Noire. A weak force of the enemy, with several cavalry regiments, was seen in the Seille valley.

On the 5th of August the first encounter took place, and between then and the 11th the Twenty-first German Army Corps, which faced our Twentieth, was reinforced by a cavalry division. On the 10th we carried the village of La Garde, but evacuated it on the following day, having inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, as General Castelnau did not wish to be drawn into a general engagement which might be premature. The Germans did not make any counter-attack, contenting themselves with shelling Pont-à-Mousson. On the 13th the units composing the Second Army had almost all detrained, and took their places according to the following general plan:

The Ninth Corps held the north front of the Grand Couronné, with the Seventieth Division of reserves on its right toward Amance. Then came the Twentieth Army Corps in the centre, with some of its troops thrown forward on the Loutre Noire, but with the

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greater part drawn up in echelons extending back in the region of Holville, Laneuveville, and Nancy. The Fifteenth Corps was in the neighborhood of Haraucourt, Drouville, Serres, and Courbesseaux; the Sixteenth at Lunéville and Xermamenil; the Fifty-ninth and Sixty-eighth Reserve Divisions were on the second line, and there were four battalions of chasseurs at Saint Nicholas.

General Joffre had settled upon August 14th for a general offensive, and on the evening of the 13th, General de Castelnau ordered his three corps to attack next morning in the direction of Avricourt. The battle of Lorraine was about to begin.

The Second Army started early on the 14th, with the Sixteenth Corps on the right, going toward Ygney and Moussey, the Fifteenth toward Serres, Parroy, and Moncourt, and the Twentieth toward Chambrey, the forest of Bezange, and Xamey. The advance was made without much difficulty; the Fifteenth Corps, however, met with such serious resistance at Moncourt that after having taken the village it was obliged to halt, as many of its units had suffered so severely that they were in no condition to go into a general engagement. The other corps made progress, the Sixteenth going to Igney and Avricourt, and the Twentieth as far as Bezange-la-Petite and Xanrey.

On the 16th of August, General de Castelnau prescribed the measures to be taken in order to attack the enemy's defensive organizations with due method, but the Germans continued to fall back, and we went

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on after them. Prisoners who fell into our hands said that their troops had lost heavily and had also suffered greatly from the heat. Our confidence increased, especially as we found, south of Marsal, trenches which had been hurriedly abandoned and many stores of munitions.

As a matter of fact, the Germans were only retreating in good order to positions prepared long beforehand, where they meant to await our attack. On the 17th the right wing of our army (composed of the Sixteenth Corps) reached the Angweiller-Bisping district above Sarrebourg, almost as far as Fenestrang, without any difficulty. The Twentieth Corps entered Château-Salins and threw out an advance-guard to the northward; the Fifteenth Corps got as far as the right bank of the Seille and occupied Marsal. The Sixteenth Corps had been obliged to make a sharp night attack at Rorbach; the impression still prevailed, however, that our army was only dealing with the German rear-guard, and everything seemed to be going on swimmingly. The serious trouble was about to begin.

When the Sixteenth Corps tried to go beyond Seille it found itself faced by a large enemy force; the cavalry corps on its right, which should have come to its aid, had been stopped some distance back; the Fifteenth Corps had not entered Dieuze, fearing to be crushed by the German heavy artillery, and was also separated from the Sixteenth by the Pool of Lindre. The Sixteenth, between these two corps, yet unsupported by either, was suspended in air, as it were, in such a

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hazardous position that a retreat on Angweiller was necessary. The Twentieth Corps alone, under Foch, still went forward, reaching Genine, on the heights to the north of Morville-les-Vic.

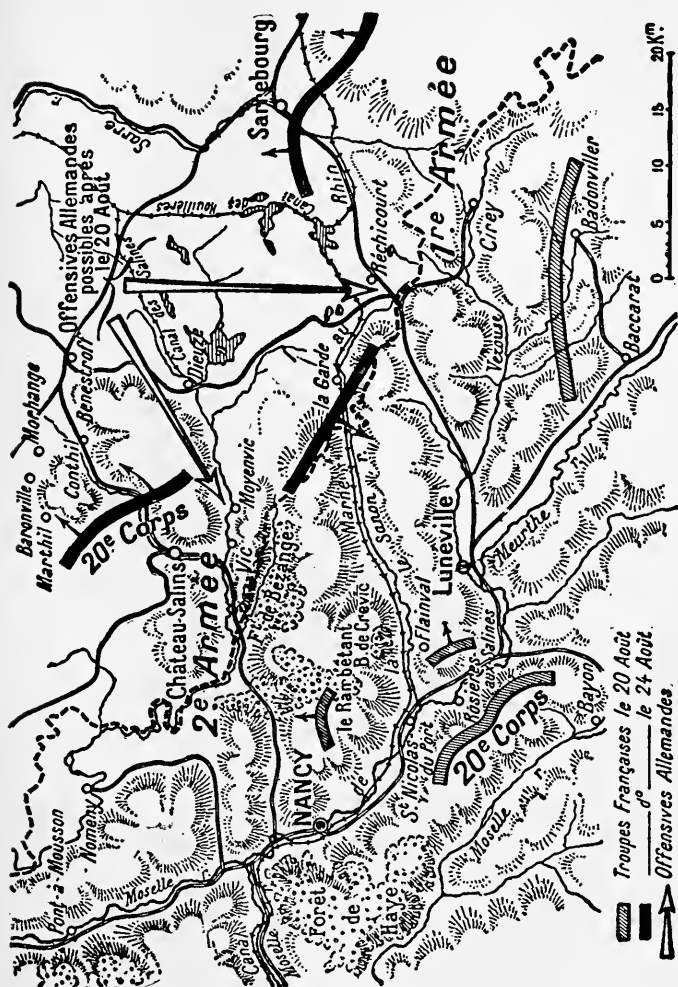
General de Castelnau, carrying out the orders of General Joffre, who wished the greatest possible number of enemy troops kept busy in Lorraine, ordered the advance to be continued; it was also important to rescue the flank of the First Army, menaced by large forces coming from Phalsbourg and Obersteigen. The objective of the Nineteenth was the occupation of the Morhange-Benestroff region, which the Germans had fortified with admirable skill; the Sixteenth Corps, while covering the army toward the east, was to come out from the region of the Pools; the Fifteenth Corps was to march in the general direction of Bensdorf, and the Twentieth on Morhange.

The Sixteenth Corps, which had already suffered severely in the previous fighting, ran against a heavy force; one of its divisions, the Thirty-first, was unable to get possession of the mouth of the canal of Salines and had to be relieved by another division, the Thirty-second.

The Fifteenth Corps carried Zomerange and Verga-ville, but could not push any further north; it found every inch of the ground was thoroughly familiar to the enemy, and our men were stopped short by terrific artillery fire. Foch's corps again went on alone, reaching the north border of the forest of Château-Salins, occupying Oron, and sending one of his bri-



# THE TWENTIETH ARMY CORPS



The French offensive in Lorraine and the defense of Nancy (August, 1914)

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gades as far as Morhange. On his left the Ninth Corps (taken away from General de Castelnau in the midst of the fighting and moved to another front) was replaced by two reserve divisions, the Sixty-eighth and the Seventieth.

On the evening of the 19th our information regarding the enemy was still somewhat vague, but there were signs leading us to suppose that the Germans had stopped falling back, and were going to fight on the ground they had picked out and prepared in advance.

General de Castelnau thought it important to get possession of the plateau to the north of the Salines Canal, and ordered the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Corps to attack together the next day on the Bussang-Donon-Cutting front, in order to reach the Sarrebourg-Benestroff railway, which would have been of great use to us. During this time the Twentieth Corps was to settle itself on the ground taken the day before and be ready for further attacks.

A thick fog had prevented any reconnaissance of the German batteries, and when the Sixteenth Corps came out into the open ground it was met by a fierce bombardment and a German counter-attack, which obliged it to retire behind its starting point and to send its artillery and supply-trains to the southward. The Fifteenth Corps was attacked still more violently, and as the ground on which it fought was very unfavorable it was quickly forced back, retreating about fifteen kilometres in the course of the morning.

## THE TWENTIETH ARMY CORPS

General Foch hoped by means of a general attack to effectively aid the advance of the Fifteenth Corps on his right; he therefore ordered his two magnificent divisions, the finest in our army, to take the heights of Baronville-Morhange at any cost, and then work to the right.

"The Twentieth Corps," writes M. Hanotaux, "proud of its strength and its fame, and carried away by that joy of battle which was the soul of our doctrine and the inspiration of our troops in the beginning of the war, could not resist the temptation of trying to strike a decisive blow."

The engagement began at five o'clock in the morning; the Eleventh Division attacked the Morhange-Récrange front, and the Thirty-ninth that of Baronville-Marthil-Brehain. They were at once subjected to a tremendous bombardment, followed almost immediately by an attack by two whole German corps.

No courage could avail in face of such overwhelming odds, and they were obliged to fall back. At half past six General de Castelnau ordered that the offensive should stop, whereupon General Foch prepared to close in on the left of the Fifteenth Corps and to take up positions which should keep him in touch with the divisions in reserve. As an additional precaution he also ordered a second line of resistance to be organized at the rear. His left division, the Thirty-ninth, was counter-attacked by heavy forces coming from the high ground to the east of Destny, and fell back on Château-Salins; the Eleventh Division to the east of

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Lidrequin, and another, the Sixty-eighth, was also involved in this obligatory withdrawal.

The situation was certainly far from good, and in order to preserve his freedom of action, about four o'clock that afternoon General de Castelnau gave the order for a general retreat. His army corps were to slip away during the night and take up positions further in the rear, protected during this movement by a strong rear-guard. The artillery and supply-trains were sent across the Meurthe.

Thus, after a few days of rapid advance and brilliant offensive, our army in Lorraine (as also that of Alsace) was forced to retire. It had encountered a superior force, supported by fortified positions, and, above all, by heavy artillery, in which our army was sadly lacking. This paucity of heavy guns was greatly to our disadvantage, moral as well as material. No men could have been more heroic than ours were, but they could not help feeling that in this regard the enemy was much better off than they.

The hard lessons of these first fights were not lost on Foch; through them he learned to see the enemy as he really was, with his strength and also his weakness, and his own robust faith was in no degree lessened.

Thanks to the prudent measures of General de Castelnau and the steadiness of our troops (especially those of the Twentieth Corps), our retreat was effected without any accident between the 20th and the 23d of August. Work on the defenses of the Grand Couronné went on rapidly, and two supplementary di-

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visions of reserves were put at the disposal of the Second Army. It must be said that the enemy, weakened by heavy losses, did not show much energy in his pursuit; our troops fell back in perfect order, and whenever the Germans came too close they were stopped short. Reorganization of all the corps went on smoothly; the Sixteenth, on the right, was obliged to evacuate Lunéville, but Foch did some very successful fighting on the heights of Flainval. The Second Army placed itself partly along the Grand Couronné and partly on the left side of the Meurthe, under orders from General Joffre to hold these two positions cost what it might, as the safety of our whole front depended on the stability of the army in Lorraine. Not only did it hold fast, but soon afterward, when a favorable opportunity presented itself, General de Castelnau seized it at once, and his force was able again to take the offensive. Retreat had not discouraged our troops; officers and men were as high-hearted after it as they had been before.

This elasticity and buoyancy of our army, which no reverse could check, showed itself from the very beginning of the war, and was a standing puzzle to the Germans, often leading them astray, as it was contrary to their psychology. Whenever we retreated they thought we were beaten, and that they might risk any manœuvre in face of an enfeebled enemy—when all at once the conquered foe sprang up most illogically, seized them by the throat, and forced them backward.

On the morning of the 24th the French Staff heard

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that at least two German corps were moving from north to south, in face of the Second Army. A general attack was ordered for the next day, its principal objective being the road from Avricourt to Einville, which seemed to be that most used by the enemy. The Sixteenth Cavalry Corps advanced, supported by a division of the Fifteenth, and the Germans gave way; General de Castelnau ordered an attack in force, and at the end of the day the Germans were in full retreat, leaving the ground heaped with their dead. The Sixteenth Corps took Rozières, and the Fifteenth de Lamatte and Blainville; while the Twentieth, worthy of itself and of its commander, carried the heights of Sommervillers and Flainval after a brilliant attack.

That was Foch's last fighting in Lorraine. While he was thus going forward again, on the full tide of success, an urgent order from General Joffre called him to report immediately at the headquarters of the General Staff.

## CHAPTER V

### AT THE HEAD OF THE NINTH ARMY

#### THE RETREAT

ON the 23d of August we lost what is known as "the battle of the frontiers." Our offensive had been checked in Lorraine and in the Ardennes; we had been beaten at Charleroi. That was the worst blow of all, as it left the whole of our left wing uncovered, obliging the immediate retreat of the British divisions and of our Fifth Army.

What would Joffre decide to do? A more impressionable leader, with nerves less under control, might easily have lost his head, and thinking the situation desperate have played a desperate game by accepting a decisive battle which, under such unfavorable conditions, would almost certainly have gone against him.

It is to Joffre's everlasting fame that he kept his presence of mind and calm judgment. Misadventure did not depress him; nothing could shake his robust optimism and unwavering faith in the valor of his soldiers and the future of France. After looking over the situation as a whole he made up his mind that although critical it was not hopeless. The first necessity was to escape the menace of the German right wing by stopping fighting and retreating in good order, making meanwhile a complete redistribution of his forces.

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While the armies of Alsace and Lorraine stood firm he would withdraw his centre and right wing from their perilous positions, then, taking a number of troops from his right wing, he would pass them over to his left in order to have a "mass" for use later.

To do this was to give the enemy possession for a time of rich and fertile provinces, but victory was the one object to be considered; if we won we could get our territory back, but if we lost we should lose everything. Foch's determination was made known in his famous general order of August 25th, to which it is well to refer, as it shadowed forth the great events which followed:

"As it has not been possible to carry out the proposed offensive movement, further operations will be so arranged that our left will be reorganized by joining together the Fourth and Fifth Armies, the British army, and new forces raised in our eastern region, into a mass capable of resuming the offensive. The other armies will hold the enemy back until this reorganization has been made."

Maunoury's army was formed on the left in close connection with the armed camp of Paris, while at the same time Joffre made a new army in the centre of his front, between the Fourth and Fifth, and summoned Foch to command it.

Joffre, with the eye of genius, had seen Foch's distinguished military qualities; he knew that when the great battle took place the centre of his forces must bear the brunt of the enemy's attack, and be therefore



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handled by a leader of the first order—and his choice fell on Foch.

We can never be grateful enough to Joffre for the almost unerring judgment with which he picked his assistants during the first weeks of the war, when he was obliged to work under tremendous pressure.

Generals who were not up to the mark were summarily removed and as speedily replaced, and Joffre's excellent selection proved him to be a remarkable judge of men. But he surpassed himself when he put Foch at the head of his new army, which was formed on the 28th of August.

On that day Foch arrived at Machault from Lorraine, and the generalissimo gave him the Ninth and Eleventh Corps, the Forty-second Division of Infantry (part of the Sixth Corps, and taken from the Third Army), the Fifty-second and Sixtieth Reserve Corps, and the Ninth Division of Cavalry. The greater part of these troops had belonged to General Langle de Cary's Fourth Army; the Ninth Corps at that time had only one of its divisions, the Seventeenth, commanded by General J. B. Dumas; the other was to come from Lorraine as soon as it could be spared. To these was added the First Moroccan Division, under General Humbert.

Foch set to work with his usual energy, forming his staff and sending the handful of officers whom he had brought with him to and fro. His trained mind quickly classified all information, and in a few days he knew his men, also the merits, defects, and dispositions

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of their officers, and for what task each was best fitted. He was like a gifted conductor of an orchestra, who knows almost instinctively the qualities of his players.

Beside his many other preoccupations, Foch was tormented by personal anxiety; for a week he had not been able to hear of his son Germain, an officer candidate in the 131st Regiment of Infantry, nor of his son-in-law, Captain Bécourt, of the Twenty-sixth Chasseurs à pied.

(In this case no news was bad news, for they had both been killed.)

Joffre's orders were that our rear-guard should attack the enemy whenever he became too pressing, and the Moroccan Division, to which I belonged, had already given the Germans some hard knocks before Foch came from Lorraine. This division, which became celebrated a fortnight later, and won laurels throughout the war, had been organized by the efforts of General Lyautey, military governor of French Morocco, and his associate, General Humbert, put in command. From the time of his leaving the military college of Saint Cyr, at the head of his class, General Humbert's career had been exceptionally brilliant; he had fought in Cochin China, and in the Madagascar expedition he showed such conspicuous bravery at the taking of Tamatave that he was made a major when only thirty-three. After leaving the Ecole de Guerre he was for a long time with the Great General Staff of the army, at the head of the Department of Works.

The division had no Moroccans, properly speaking,

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that is to say, no natives; it was made up of colonial infantry, French and Algerian zouaves, and some Algerian sharpshooters, while its officers were taken from those of our army in Morocco, all of them picked men. From the moment that news of the war reached Casablanca every one of these officers was eager to be sent to fight in France, and General Lyautey's patience was sorely tried by their importunity.

Sailing from Casablanca the division landed at Cette and went from there to Bordeaux by rail, where it was reorganized into:

1st. General Blondlat's brigade, composed of two mixed regiments, colonial infantry and zouaves, and

2d. Two mixed regiments not brigaded, those of Colonel Fellert and Colonel Cros, consisting of sharpshooters and zouaves.

Detraining near Charleville, on August 21st, the division was attached to the Ninth Corps, which was part of the Fourth Army, and began to fight before all its battalions had arrived; one of them, commanded by Major de Ligny, did not join until the 30th of August, two days after the fight at Fosse-à-l'Eau, so it was said that our right was at Charleville and our left at Casablanca.

On the 23d of August the division came into contact with the Germans for the first time; its business was to hold them back so that the retreat should not be interfered with. The day was very fine, and as we were halting at Gesponsart, a frontier village of Bel-

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gian Luxembourg, northeast of Charleville, General Dumas with several officers went by on horseback.

Seeing General Humbert, General Dumas rode up to speak to him, and as I happened to be standing near I heard their conversation. "My friend," said General Dumas, "we shall have our hands full with those fellows, for their infantry know how to fight and also how to take cover, and when they're behind a hedge one can't see their uniforms. We shall beat them, but it won't be easy." And the general rode on along the dusty road. I remember his very words, and I recall them now because they show what our leaders felt. They did not underestimate the enemy's strength and ability, but they never for a moment doubted the result of the struggle.

On the 28th of August the Moroccans were attacked by an entire Saxon corps, belonging to von Hausen's army, at Fosse-à-l'Eau, near Signy l'Abbaye. It was the first time that the division "let itself go," and it rushed against the invaders with such fury and fearlessness that they were routed, although they far outnumbered us, and we remained masters of the field. There were some magnificent episodes in this fight. Colonel Cros, one of the men who are born to lead others, carried the village of Fosse-à-l'Eau by main force, and held it against obstinate German attacks.

As night fell we saw him still there, helping his men to improvise defenses for the village, in the thick of the fighting if the enemy came on, and inspiring all around him with his own contempt of danger.

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He came from Saverne, in Lorraine, and was a talented archæologist as well as a brave soldier, having at one time made some important excavations in Mesopotamia for the Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles-Lettres. About fifteen years ago I happened to make a voyage with him from Port Said to Bombay, as I was on my way to India and the Far East, and we became friends. He told me about his researches, in which he was passionately interested, and of his long and lonely sojournings among the Bedouins; he was a choice spirit, full of ardor, idealism, and concentrated energy. He escaped scot-free at Fosse-à-l'Eau, but was wounded at the battle of the Marne, and on the 9th of May, 1915, as he was leading his men after they had taken some German positions, a bullet in the brain killed him instantly.

When we first met the Germans in 1914 they were prodigal of their forces, wasting them with the greatest unconcern; having made up their minds to fight to a finish, no matter at what cost, they multiplied their assaults, often hurling their men against the same resistance five or six times running. They felt so sure of winning in a few weeks that the loss of some thousands or hundreds of thousands of lives, more or less, did not make much difference; what mattered was to go fast and strike hard.

As night closed in on that 28th of August I saw a column of men in close formation coming out of a wood close to us, between Maisonnelle and Fosse-à-

## FOCH

l'Eau. As it was growing dark we thought at first they were ours, but General Humbert looked at them through his glass and exclaimed: "Why, they're Germans! What cheek! The artillery, quick!" A battery beside us opened fire at once. The first shot went over them, the second fell short, but the third found the range, and a hail of shells fell on the easy target. We saw whole lines mowed down, the dead men seeming to leap into the air. In a few minutes the whole column had been wiped out; only a few were left alive here and there, and they disappeared in the fields.

About eleven o'clock that night we were all—the general, we officers of his staff, some cavalymen of his escort, and a few runners—in a farmhouse at Fosse-à-l'Eau. Bullets were whistling on all sides, as the outposts were barely eight hundred metres away, and we did not know what was going on to our right or left, but we did know that the afternoon had been most successful, and we were congratulating ourselves and going over it, when suddenly there came an order from the army corps to pick ourselves up and move back immediately. It was not overeasy to do, for we were in contact with the enemy, and there were only three or four hours of kindly darkness in which to move a whole division, with its supply-trains and the artillery of the division and of the corps. But we did it, and it worked admirably; the Germans had lost so heavily and been so knocked about that day that they were not very anxious to go after us. Toward the afternoon

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of the following day (as we learned from one of our surgeons who had to be left with his wounded in the village and was sent back from Germany some months later), they decided to carry the village by storm with a very heavy force; they rushed into it with shouts of triumph—to find it completely evacuated.

The French had been gone for more than twelve hours.

Two days later the Moroccan division had more hard fighting at Bertoncourt, near Rethel, and again gave a good account of itself. That was on the 30th of August, the day but one after General Foch had taken command of the Ninth Army. I remember especially one incident: with magnificent dash our sailors attacked a village held by the Saxons, and carried it at the point of the bayonet as the Saxons, with despicable cowardice and cruelty, had placed the civil population before them as a shield against our fire. The fact is mentioned in official reports and attested by many depositions, one more damning than the other.

The retreat went on, by Perthes-le-Chatelet, Alincourt, and Vitry-le-Reims; that brought us to the very gates of Rheims—and yet we did not stop. Never shall I forget crossing that city. I had to start in the middle of the night, ahead of the columns, in the direction of Epervain to get quarters ready for the staff. The old city was fast asleep in the moonlight, with not a soul abroad in her streets; I was not sure of my way, and as I was looking for some one to

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help me I made for the cathedral almost instinctively. How magnificent it was as it rose into the clear summer night! Its towers lifted themselves into the starry sky, as if forever watching over and guarding the city resting at its feet.

Tauxières-Mutry, in the hills among the vineyards, then Epernay, Vertus; we were going toward the south—when should we stop? After the Aisne and the Marne, should we go as far as the Aube, or even the Seine?

It was bitterly hard to abandon our cities, the jewels of France, and the rich countryside where, when night fell, the enemy lighted his way by the torches of our burning villages. Long lines of refugees, a lamentable procession, blocked all the roads and paths. They came from Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Ardennes, from everywhere, and the further we retreated the greater the crowd of these poor creatures grew. The misery was heart-breaking, and all the worse because we were obliged to be stern toward them in order to keep the highways clear for the marching armies, our country's only hope.

But neither the retreat, the loss of our territory, nor the sight of the wretched refugees could affect the morale of our troops. They fell back *because that was the order*, because the generalissimo, in whom we all had the greatest confidence, had decided that it must be. Our retreat was made willingly—not forced upon us. Our material and moral forces were intact. The Germans had not beaten us—on the contrary, after



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every encounter we were sure that we could and should beat them.

I cannot lay too much stress on this point, because otherwise our victory at the Marne would appear supernatural, and therefore not to be explained. Those who looked at it from afar off may have thought it miraculous, but those who took part therein, the soldiers who threw all their hearts into the struggle, because they knew that the future and the very life of France was at stake, were at no loss to explain the German defeat. The enemy let go because he could no longer hold on, and fell back to avoid still more crushing disaster.

General Foch made use of those five days of retreat to study his army thoroughly and to take account of all its elements, the officers quite as much as the men. He felt the approach of the critical hour that should bring the decisive battle; he knew on whom he could count; the mighty instrument on which he was to play was already familiar to his hand.

## THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

On Saturday, September 5th, 1914—a day forever memorable in the history of the world—the retreat of the French army came to an end. We had left Vertus very early in the morning, and had gone before to prepare the cantonments, as our division was to push on beyond Fère-Champenoise to Coroy. Toward noon, a complete change—the “*coup de théâtre*”! From the

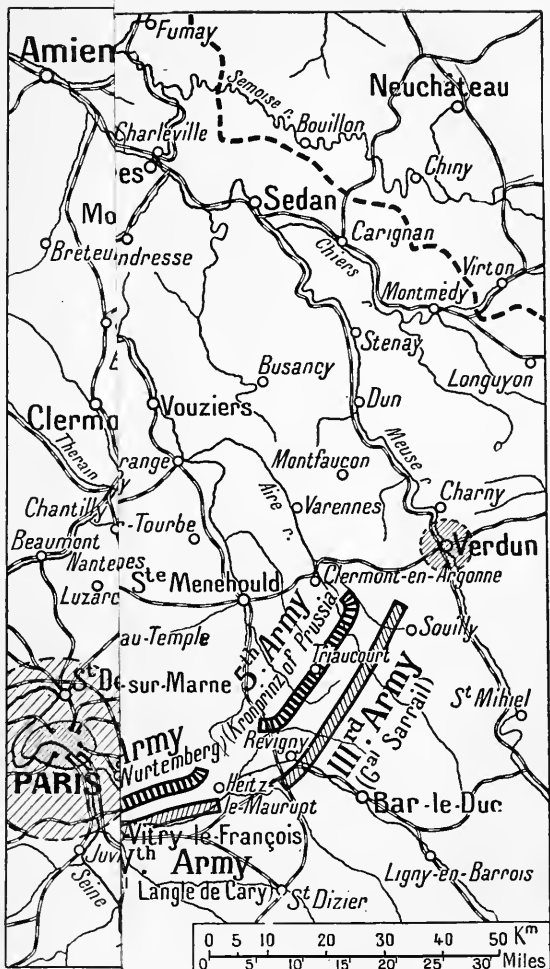
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Great General Headquarters came the order for which the armies had been impatiently waiting—the famous order of the day which will be one of Joffre's chiefest claims to glory; its words are as if inspired by the steadfast faith of the leader in his army and of the army in its chief.

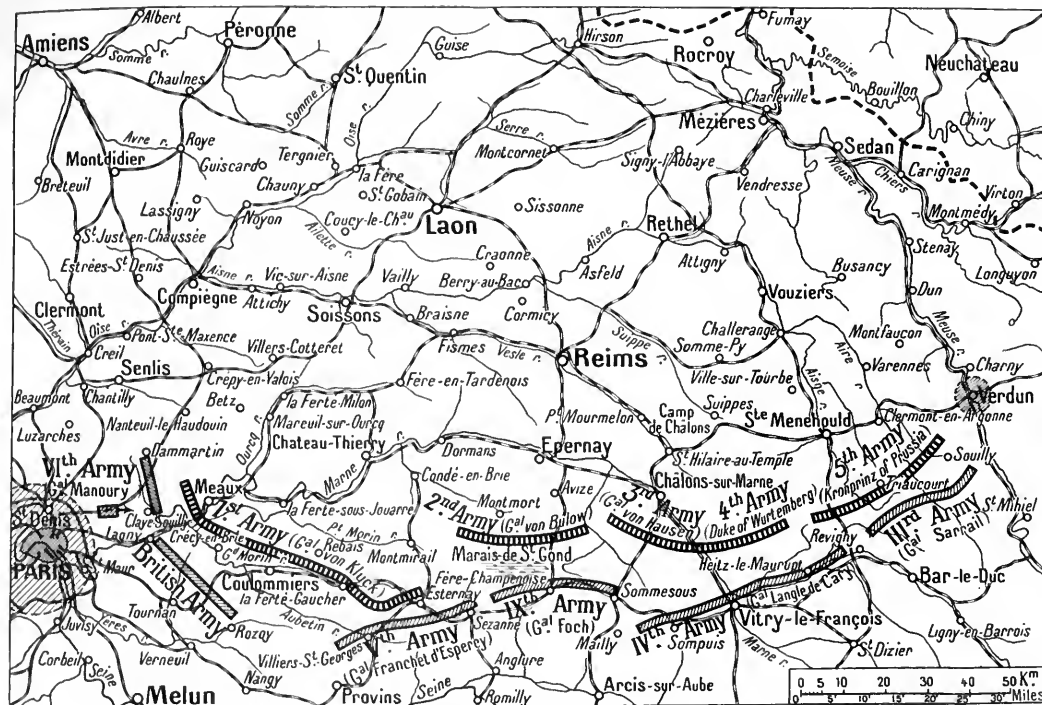
“At the moment of going into a battle on which the fate of our country depends it is necessary to remind every one that the time has passed for looking behind us; every effort must be made to attack and to drive back the enemy. The hour has come to advance at any cost, and to die where you stand rather than give way. In the present circumstances no weakness can be tolerated.”

It is well known that the commander-in-chief had considered the possibility of a further retreat, extending even as far as the Seine and the Aube. Loss of ground did not count; the end was to be determined by strategic reasons only.

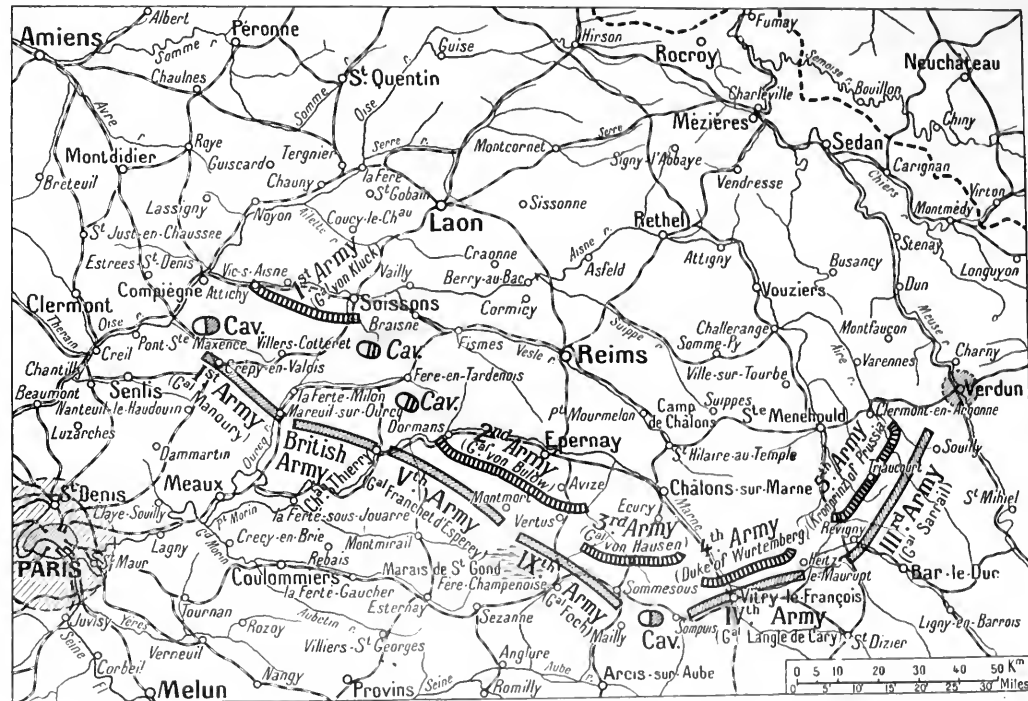
When his left wing, his Fifth Army, and the British divisions were safe from the danger of envelopment by the German right wing, and as soon as the new arrangement of our forces was completed by the reorganization of Maunoury's army, it would be time to stop. Now, on September 4th, all these conditions had been fulfilled; Maunoury's army was ready to strike; the British divisions and the Fifth Army (of General Franchet d'Esperey) no longer ran any risk of being turned—on the contrary, the German right wing was now threatened. General von Kluck had







THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE.  
Position of the armies, September 5, 1914.



THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE.  
Position of the armies, September 10, 1914.



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rushed blindly in pursuit of the British and our Fifth Army, as a wild boar charges with lowered head; by so doing he had made a sharp bend toward the southeast on the 3d of September, not pressing his advance on Paris for the moment, and also (which was more serious) not noticing that Maunoury's army was massed on his flank.

If he did not know of its presence there the much-vaunted German intelligence department was grievously at fault, but it is more probable that von Kluck knew its whereabouts, but underestimated its strength. He may have thought it made up of reserves and of the territorial divisions which he had been battering near Amiens, regrouped; the Germans, as I have said, always invited defeat by undervaluing their opponent's resources and his morale. In the present case, from whatever reason, von Kluck only left one corps to face Maunoury.

Joffre knew on the 4th that von Kluck had changed his course, and after a momentous interview with General Galliéni (who had charge of the defenses of Paris) he gave out his famous order that evening.

As one looks back at the battle of the Marne its countless details disappear, and one sees only a majestic whole laid out on simple lines, like the masterpieces of classic French art. It must therefore be looked at as a whole in order to be understood. The front was over three hundred kilometres long, running from Paris to the Vosges, but the battle was finally decided in two sectors; by Maunoury's army at the

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battle of the Ourcq, and by Foch's at the marshes of Saint Gond.

Joffre's general order determining the position and task of each army ran thus:

- I. Advantage must be taken of the precarious situation of the First German Army (von Kluck) by concentrating against it the forces of the Allied armies on the extreme left. All arrangements will be made on September 5th, in view of an attack on the 6th.
- II. The disposition of forces to be effected on the evening of September 5th, will be:
  - (a) All the forces at the disposal of the Sixth Army (Maunoury), northeast of Meaux, must be ready to cross the Ourcq between Lizy-sur-Ourcq and May-en-Multien, in the general direction of Château-Thierry.
  - (b) The British army, on the Changis-Coulommiers front, will be ready to attack in the general direction of Montmirail.
  - (c) The Fifth Army (Franchet d'Esperey), in slightly closer formation on the left, will take its position along the general line Courtaçon-Esternay-Sézanne, ready to attack in the general direction of south-north. The Second Cavalry Corps will secure the connection between the British troops and the Fifth Army.



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(d) The Ninth Army (Foch) will cover the right of the Fifth Army, and hold the southern approaches to the marshes of Saint Gond. A portion of its forces will take up their position on the plateau north of Sézanne.

III. The offensive will be taken by these various armies on the morning of September 6th.

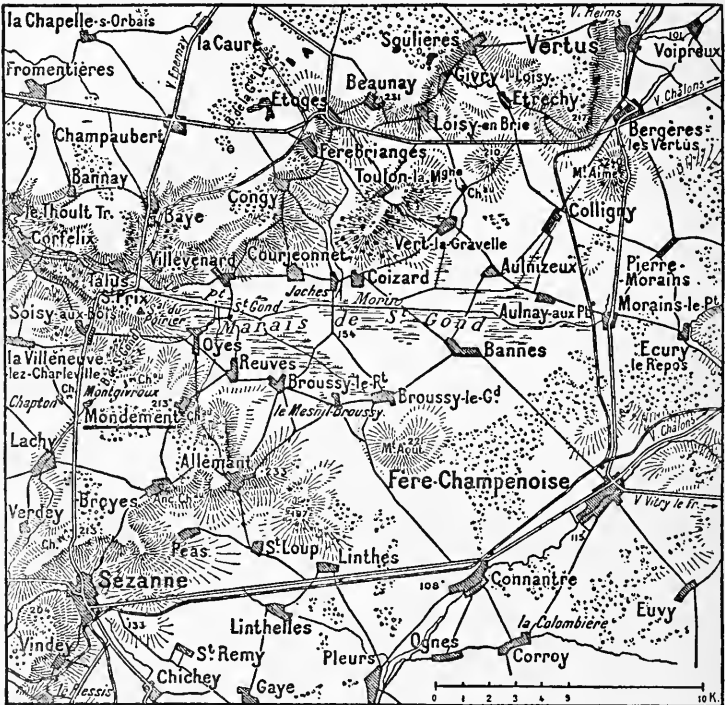
The Third Army (General Sarraill) and the Fourth (General Langle de Cary) received their orders on the 6th. The Third was to come out of Revigny and take the offensive toward the west, and the Fourth to stop marching southward and unite with the Third.

A glance at the map will show that when the fighting began Foch's army was in the very centre of the French front. On the evening of the 5th the general's quarters were at Pleurs, a small village half-way between Sézanne and Fère-Champenoise, south of the highway connecting them. The headquarters of the army were a little farther south.

The Forty-second Division was at Villeneuve-lès-Charleville, in touch with the army next it; the Moroccan division was at Mondement and Saint Prix; the Ninth Corps held the Fère-Champenoise region, with its advance-guard toward Morains-le-Petit and to the north of the marshes of Saint Gond, in the region of Toulon-la-Montagne; the Eleventh Corps was in

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the region of Semoine, Lenharrée, and Sommesous, barring the road from Châlons-sur-Marne to Arcis-sur-Aube; the Ninth Cavalry Division was on its right



Map of the marsh country of Saint Gond and Fère-Champenoise

at the camp of Mailly, in touch with the Fourth Army next it, while the reserve divisions were somewhat farther back, north of the Aube.

According to General Joffre's orders the task of the Ninth Army was chiefly defensive; it was to cover the

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Fifth Army by holding the southern approaches to the marshes of Saint Gond and to place a part of its force on the plateau north of Sézanne.

As one follows the highway from Fère-Champenoise to Sézanne one sees to the right a ridge of high ground hanging like a long cliff over the wide plain below, and highest at Mont Chalmont, Mont Août, Allemant, and Broyes. On the other side of these heights, to the north, are the famous marshes of Saint Gond, named from an abbey founded in the seventh century and turned into a convent later. A stream called the Petit Morin runs the whole length of the marshes, which are only under water during the winter floods; in summer they are dry for the most part, with here and there shallow pools covered with reeds and water-loving plants.

All this region of Montmirail, Champaubert, and Fère-Champenoise has made history in many wars. The hordes of Attila were checked here in 451, and here also in 1814, more than a thousand years later, Napoleon, with a handful of improvised troops, won battles which were memorable although without lasting results. A wide stretch of level ground to the west of the road between Fère-Champenoise and Vertus is known in the countryside as "the battle-field."

Fate had decreed that the fortunes of France, and through her those of the whole civilized world, should be decided on this old fighting-ground.

The struggle was violent throughout, but, as the mighty battle went on, more savage and determined at

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some points than at others. One of these points was the château of Mondement. It stands in the very centre of the field, on the plateau above the marshes of Saint Gond, the picturesque outline of its thick round towers and sturdy walls visible for miles around. It was taken by the Germans and retaken by the French in an heroic and desperate assault, after three successive attacks had failed. Mondement is already a place of pilgrimage, and will be so increasingly as time goes on, for all those who wish to live over again one of the great moments of history. Its ruins are a monument to our victory.

On the evening of the 5th the Moroccan division was ordered to send a brigade toward Courjonnet and Coizard, north of the marshes, and at any cost to prevent the Germans from gaining their southern border. Blondlat's brigade went briskly forward, but was soon opposed by an enemy force of much greater number, and during the night some of its "arabas" (the light Moroccan carts used in the African brush) were lost in crossing the marshes. That night we slept at Broussy-le-Grand, and at daybreak next morning the struggle began again; the artillery and rifle firing was furious all along the line.

In obedience to Foch's orders the left wing of the Moroccan division tried to advance, Colonel Cros, bravest of the brave, being ordered to carry Saint Prix with his sharpshooters, in order to clear the way for the Forty-second Division on his left. The fighting was very stubborn, as Cros's men were far out-

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numbered by the enemy; at the farm of Montalent some companies of Fralon's battalion pushed their way in at the point of the bayonet.

When night fell on the 6th our division held fast to its positions, and the same was true of the Forty-second Division on our left, but the Ninth Corps on our right, which had tried to place advance-guards north of the marshes, had been forced by violent attacks to fall back. About eleven o'clock in the morning General Blondlat reported to General Humbert that the Seventeenth Division of the Ninth Corps, on his right, had evacuated Mont Toulon and that the enemy was rapidly advancing on that side. This advance left exposed one of our artillery groups, that of Martin, and it was obliged to limber up and fall back on Bannes at full speed. The Ninth Corps, however, held the southern border of the marshes, and at its right the Eleventh Corps was steady on the front of Morains-le-Petit, Ecury-le-Repos, and Normée. During the night these villages were set on fire by a tremendous bombardment, and the two latter had to be evacuated.

The forces which were attacking us were part of von Bülow's army and of von Hausen's Saxons, and we were faced by the Prussian Imperial Guard, which was north of the marshes.

The headquarters of my division that evening were at the château of Mondement, and I shall never forget how extraordinary it looked at the end of that beautiful summer day. It stands with its back toward the north, almost on the edge of the cliff, and

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the entrance is from the level ground on the west side, not far from the road. A large forecourt is enclosed by an iron railing; the main building is only two stories high with round towers at the corners and wings on either side.

The court, crowded with soldiers, was full of movement and animation; here and there fires had been kindled to cook the evening meal, and mounted orderlies and runners were coming and going incessantly.

In the midst of this noise and confusion the master of the house, M. J——, seemed rather helpless and upset, as well he might be, especially as he was in feeble health and old before his time. He was alone in the château save for his old mother, an equally old housekeeper, and an old priest who lived near and had sought shelter with them. The servants had all fled two days before, including the chauffeur, leaving the family helpless; there was a fine limousine in the garage, but no one to drive it. We felt very sorry for the poor souls into whose peaceable lives the thunderbolt of war had suddenly fallen. When the old housekeeper opened the cellar to get out a few bottles of wine for us she said to me timidly:

“Do you think there’s any danger? Perhaps it would be prudent to go away at once, but how are we to do it?”

How was I to answer such an ingenuous question? There was danger enough, in all conscience, for Mondement from its commanding position was bound to be

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in the thick of the fighting, and fiercely disputed by both sides. The enemy's artillery had been showering us with shells from their big guns that afternoon with their usual prodigality. It is really almost impossible to imagine the orgy of heavy artillery firing indulged in by the Germans in these early days of the war; they well knew the capital importance of a prompt decision, and were determined at whatever cost and by whatever means to shake our morale.

I was sure that the château and the little church near it would be a target for the German gunners that night or as soon as it was daylight next morning, but I was careful not to say this to the poor old soul, who would probably not have understood me if I had. I reassured her as best I could, and advised her to induce the whole household to take refuge in the cellar as soon as they heard the first shells. Then I told the orderlies to close all the shutters tight on the north side of the house in order that no light should filter through; that might spare us a nocturnal bombardment and give us a chance to dine and snatch a few hours' sleep, which would be so much to the good. And dine we did, with fine appetites, in the charming dining-room of our involuntary host. The house was full of beautiful old furniture, eighteenth-century pastel portraits, glass cases of exquisite china, ivories, and other precious trifles, all arranged with great taste.

The first shells fell on Mondement as soon as it was light enough to get the range, and before long the bombardment became intense. General Humbert had

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chosen it for his post of command and he stood, with his chief of staff, now at the foot of one of the towers, now beside the neighboring church, looking through his field-glasses at the wide plain stretching below. As soon as he left one spot for another an enormous "marmite" would fall where he had been standing, smashing into the walls or making a crater in the ground as deep as a well. It almost seemed as if the German gunners had spotted him with their telescopes and were aiming directly at him. Our chief surgeon, M. Baur, said in a low voice to one of my comrades: "Why don't you stand behind one of these big trees? You can see just as well, and you'll be sheltered"; then, to practise what he preached, he stepped behind the huge trunk of an old horse-chestnut. In a few seconds a big shell cut the tree in two as though it had been a match, killing our surgeon instantly; another fell among the cavalry escort, and many men and horses were killed. Soon there were so many craters in the road that it was almost impassable for motor-cars, and still the bombardment grew steadily hotter.

Toward noon our position became untenable, and General Humbert moved two kilometres farther back, at the edge of the forest, on the road to Broyes.

During these days the heat was scorching; the sun poured his pitiless rays on the heights and the plain where two mighty armies, the marrow, as it were, of two great nations, were clinched in a supreme effort. From Paris to the Vosges, the long battle-line was



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ablaze. The decisive battle was on, our fate hung in the balance, and every one of us, from the highest to the lowest, knew it.

They were days never to be forgotten; sometimes they seemed as long as centuries, and again they sped like minutes; my teacher, M. Bergson, was right when he said that time is only measured by the intensity of our emotions during its passage. A sharp line seemed to be drawn between those hours and all our previous lives.

I cannot remember whether I slept or not. If I did it was certainly not at night, but sometimes in daytime, by snatches, now under a tree, now by the edge of a ditch; nothing mattered except the mighty evolution of the battle with its ups and downs, its alternations of failure and success.

Notwithstanding all the German efforts, the left wing of Foch's army, composed of the Forty-second Division and the Moroccan, stood firm and kept its front straight, but during the third day of the battle (September 8th) his centre and right wing, toward Champenoise, were seriously bent, and this grew worse instead of better. Our Eleventh Corps, hotly attacked by some guard regiments belonging to the Twelfth German Corps and also by their reserves, was obliged to fall back south of the little Maurienne brook, on the front of Corroy-Gourgançon-Semoine. We lost Fère-Champenoise, and as Foch's post of command would have been too much exposed he moved it farther south, to Plancy.

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The line of our army as a whole was now slanting, as we could see from the château of Broyes (the village of that name is perched at the end of the cliff, and part of the old rampart of the château is in the vicarage garden). From there we had a wide view over the plain. The Germans had got beyond Fère-Champenoise, and now, as the day drew to its close, the whole vast stretch below was covered with an unnatural haze, shot through with gleams of red and orange. It was like some strange apocalyptic vision; the last rays of the summer sun fell on the clouds of dust stirred by the gun carriages, by horses' hoofs, and by the tramp of marching men; innumerable shells were flashing and bursting everywhere, but all other lights paled before the steady glare from our burning villages.

Looking from that height it was clear to us that our Moroccan division *must* stand firm—that was indispensable, even essential, for if the Germans succeeded in pushing as far as Mondement and made themselves masters of the plateau, our line would be broken and the centre of our armies driven in. Their heavy artillery could shell our columns to any extent as we fell back across the plain, and a retreat might easily be turned into a rout.

Some time in the middle of that night a countryman came bearing a letter which he insisted must be given to General Humbert at once. It contained a few lines hurriedly scrawled in pencil by M. J——, the unfortunate owner of Mondement, imploring the general to

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send a motor-car at once to deliver his old mother, his old housekeeper, the old priest, and himself from the hell in which they found themselves. The frightful bombardment had been going on over their heads all day as they huddled shut up in the cellar, and after every crash they could hear the stones of the house crumbling and falling above them.

One of our comrades pluckily set off to fetch them, at the imminent risk of breaking his neck in the craters, and it was well that they did get out that night, for the old house was to have a much worse time during the next two days.

On account of the extreme importance of the position which we were holding, the Ninth Corps, on our right, lent us their 77th Regiment of infantry to back up the regiments of Colonel Cros and Colonel Fellert, on our left, toward the Crete du Poirier, beyond the wood of Saint Gond. But on the 8th, in the middle of the day, that auxiliary regiment was hurriedly ordered to Saint Loup, as our front there was unsteady.

This movement did not escape the keen eyes of the Germans, who were close to us, and at once became more enterprising, while on the other hand Colonel Cros's sharpshooters were somewhat disagreeably impressed by seeing the 77th apparently retire. He and Colonel Fellert took their regiments back again toward Montgivroux, and Blondlat's brigade stood firm a little farther to the rear, near Allemant.

The battle was in its third day, and the situation was becoming more and more serious. Left to our-

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selves as we were, and attacked by such overpowering numbers, could we hold out? And what would happen if we gave way?

It is in moments like these that great leaders come to the fore by their strength of will and untiring energy, and one must have lived through such moments to know the value of a positive decision made by a cool head and an intrepid spirit.

General Foch was master of the situation. He knew through information received at Great Headquarters that the Fifth Army, on his left, was in an excellent position and advancing steadily, the Germans being in full retreat. To ward off the threatened danger, they were likely to attempt to throw Foch's army into disorder, and break the centre of the French front.

After his usual fashion Foch summed up his conclusions in a concise phrase: "If they attack me so hard here, it must be because they are badly off elsewhere." It was therefore imperative to put out all our strength and hold on, whatever happened—and the best way to defend oneself, after all, is to strike. When everything seemed to be going against him Foch sent this message to Great Headquarters: "My centre is giving way, my right falling back; the situation is excellent. I shall attack." He was able to impart this calm confidence, born of comprehensive vision, to all his subordinates, and it must be said that his associates were worthy of their chief. General Humbert sent us one order after another; we were to stick fast, no matter what happened, to neglect no possible advantage, and

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utilize every resource. He wrote to one of his subordinates, with the order to stand firm: "Your honor is at stake," and when an artillery officer suggested the advisability of a less exposed position he received an answer which took away all desire to change it.

Another night came, bringing with it anxiety and foreboding instead of sleep. Surely the next day must decide the battle, one way or the other—the fate of our country was trembling in the balance—which side of the scales would go up? There were some wretched refugees from Rheims near us and I had promised to let them know if things went very badly, as they were ready to drag themselves still farther rather than fall into the enemy's hands. For a moment that night I was on the point of warning them that they had better move, but hope and faith held me back. No—I would not tell them—to do so would be to doubt that we should win—and that I did not dare!

### THE DECISIVE MOMENT—FOCH'S MANŒUVRE

Daylight came only too quickly, and at once the battle began again. Brave Colonel Cros, who had managed to give his sharpshooters some food and sleep, launched them in the direction of the Signal du Poirier, and gained a foothold in the northern part of the wood of Saint Gond.

Soon we had a very serious blow. A whole German brigade came out of Reuves and made for Mondement; our troops, which had been holding the villages and the

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approaches to the château, were so outnumbered that they had to fall back. A regiment of artillery had been ordered to support our division, and as its commander, Colonel Barthal, was directing the placing of his batteries he was struck by a shell and instantly killed. The Germans got into the château, and at once proceeded to make it into an improvised fortress by punching loop-holes in the walls and installing machine-guns in the second story and the garret.

With Mondement in the enemy's hands our situation became even more critical, especially as all our reserves, to the last man, were already engaged. In answer to an appeal from General Humbert, the Forty-second Division, on our left, lent us its chasseurs à pied to reinforce our Ninth Corps, on the right, and with their help we stopped the Germans from advancing beyond Mondement. A counter-attack on the château was then ordered, but did not succeed, as the enemy had had time to organize an effectual defense. That did not matter; we knew we must go on fighting until it was in our hands again, as it was the key of the whole situation.

Word was sent to us that we should have back the 77th Regiment; but could it possibly reach us in time? We despatched one motor-cyclist after another to its colonel, begging him to make all haste, and watched for it impatiently. At last we saw its men come toiling cheerfully up the steep road to Broyes as hard as they could go, although the heat and dust were stifling. There was no time for a halt, not even for a

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swallow of coffee—on they went, fast and faster, beyond the pine wood where the shells were falling like rain; it was like going into a fiery furnace, but Mondement must be taken.

While our left, the Moroccan division and the Forty-second were holding on with desperate determination to the edge of the Champenoise cliffs, our centre and right continued to fall back. On the morning of the 9th, two of our corps, the Ninth and Eleventh, were attacked by three German corps, and the Guard regiments charged so solidly that our front wavered. In the centre its line ran at the foot of the heights at Allemant, to the northeast outskirts of the village of Connantre, while on the right our retirement was even more noticeable; we had been obliged to fall back from Gourgauçon as far as Salon.

Foch's confidence still remained unshaken. The Fifth Army, next his, lent him its Tenth Corps, which allowed him to relieve the Forty-second Division while the battle was in full swing. He then decided to throw this gallant division immediately across from our left to our right wing in order to fall suddenly upon the enemy's flank. Military men call this a "*mouvement de rocade*," and its use by Foch at that crucial moment was a stroke of genius; it was, moreover, admirably executed and one of the chief determinants of our victory.

While this movement was being carried out by the Forty-second Division, its artillery was not needed for two hours, and was therefore loaned to us for a more

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violent bombardment of Mondement, which it was absolutely necessary that we should retake. Never was a windfall more welcome!

The commander of this divisional artillery, Colonel Boichut, the virtuoso of the 75-mm. gun, was himself on the spot, and directed its magnificent action. The batteries came up at a full trot, and in the twinkling of an eye had taken up their position to the north of the village of Broyes, in a semi-circle. From there they opened a withering fire on the château of Mondement and the slopes leading up to it. The sun blazed down on the baking plateau where the artillerymen worked, but not for a second did the great pieces stop their infernal music. No troops in the world, no matter how brave, could advance through such a pitiless barrage; we were to see its effects next day in the roads and fields around the château.

It was, of course, the best possible preparation for a second attack on Mondement, but this second attack failed, like the first. Our men got as far as the walls of the château, and the iron railing around the court, but there they were stopped by murderous fire from the German machine-guns.

This second failure only made us all, from our general down, more determined to succeed. Mondement must be taken. Our final victory, like all our others during the war, was the fruit of intrepid will and dogged determination.

Late in the afternoon the general ordered a third attack. The guns were to be hauled up until they were



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within five or even three hundred metres of the château; its walls were to be rent open by shells and machine-guns—at any cost the enemy must be dislodged.

These orders were carried out to the letter. The guns were pulled up close, and the assault made from three sides at once. This time it was successful. "Come along, my boys!" cried Colonel Lestoquois to his men as they hurled themselves at the château, "one more last pull and we've got them!"

The Germans, bewildered and caught in a trap, lost their heads, and when they saw the bayonets of our men all who could jumped headlong out of the windows, abandoning their machine-guns and rifles. The rest surrendered or were run through.

As night fell Mondement was ours again.

While our assault was going on, the Forty-second Division, led by its intrepid general, Grossetti, made a flank attack on the Guard corps, in the direction of Fère-Champenoise. This sudden onslaught demoralized the Germans—it was the drop too much in a vase full of water. They had been fighting hard for four whole days, and their troops were worn out. So were ours, for that matter, and it was only a supreme effort of French energy and tenacity that sent the trembling balance down at last.

Foch's sudden manœuvre took the Germans entirely by surprise; they found themselves attacked at their weakest point, where there was a sort of pocket in their front, and that just at the critical moment when

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all their reserves were exhausted. The moral factor was even more affected than the material; the German staff felt itself beaten and lost its grip; the signal to retreat was given.

Fate had done her work; the French army had won the greatest victory of all time.

Let us now observe Foch's bearing during these four days of battle, and during the splendid manœuvre which gave the German army its death-blow. Let us remember his doctrines at the Ecole de Guerre, for we shall find them exactly carried out on the field.

He taught that war is, above all, a matter of determination, belonging to the class of moral forces, and that a battle is lost morally, not materially.

Therefore, when his centre and right were driven in, he drew upon his will; he determined not to acknowledge himself beaten.

"My centre is giving way, my right falling back; the situation is excellent. I shall attack."

Those words, "the situation is excellent," spoken at such a moment, almost seem like bravado, but, on the contrary, they are profoundly true. To be well-informed and to see clearly is the first duty of a commander, said Foch again, and he saw the enemy's situation as a whole, not allowing himself to be unduly influenced by what was happening around him. He saw the battle as an aviator sees a landscape, from above, and this vision gave him entire confidence. When one of his generals objected that his troops were

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tired out he replied tersely: "The Germans are still more so. You will attack."

Nothing could have been truer, and the Germans were more fatigued than we because they felt that victory was deserting them. They redoubled their efforts and threw their last troops into the struggle as a desperate gambler at bay stakes all he has left on a last card. Foch's long study and reflection had taught him to know the Teutonic temperament and methods; he felt his adversary's steel, and knew his strength and weakness.

He also taught that, in every battle, there is a culminating point for which one should have forces in reserve in order to strike hard at the right time and place. Genius in a leader consists in knowing when and where that is. There must be prudence and foresight as well as daring; a manœuvre during a battle is only knowing how to prepare a decisive movement beforehand, and launch it at the proper time.

During those four days he followed his own counsel to the letter. He waited, held himself back, spared his forces carefully, and when the right time came he knew where to strike.

If Grossetti's counter-attack had been made earlier it would very likely have had little effect, but coming when the enemy was tired out and had used up all his reserves it was the push which determined the German retreat. By launching this division at that precise time Foch made what Napoleon called "an event." Its arrival on the German flank at the su-

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preme moment produced an effect at the battle of the Marne like that of MacDonald's column at Wagram and, in both cases, that effect was more moral than material.

Energy, clear vision, coolness, control of himself and of others—all these qualities were shown by Foch in his conduct during the long conflict.

"Victory," said he, "always belongs to men who deserve her by superior strength of will and intelligence"—and he proved the truth of his words at the battle of the Marne.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On September 7th, 1917, the third anniversary of the battle, an impressive ceremony took place at Fère-Champenoise and Mondement. Standing in the court of the château, in the presence of the President of the Republic, M. Poincaré, the Premier, M. Ribot, and the Secretary of War, M. Painlevé, General Foch related some memorable incidents of the battle in his usual concise and exact manner, beginning his story with the arrival of General Joffre's famous order in the morning of September 5th. He described the fierce German attacks on the 6th, and that on the 7th, the Eleventh Corps on his right, "which had suffered severely at Charleroi, having lost almost all its officers," was "badly shaken." When attacked at Ecurey-le-Repos and Normée it found the Germans making use of "their usual treacherous artifices." "Don't shoot!" they cried, and the simple Bretons allowed them to come close. The Eleventh Corps being unsteady, there was nothing to stop retreat, and on the 8th the situation was even worse; Fère-Champenoise was lost, and the whole line thrown back. The Tenth Corps was given to Foch as a reinforcement, and he decided to throw the Forty-second Division, in which he had entire confidence, into action. Its movement had to be covered; that task was intrusted to the troops of the Moroccan division, and well did they fulfil it! They occupied the château of Mondement and the woods around it, and were told to "stand firm at any cost, as they were the axis on which the battle would turn." In Foch's own words, "Fate willed that the Moroccan division should be there—and it made good."

"At last," said he, "Grossetti moved his troops in perfect order, and their place was taken by the Tenth Corps."

This manoeuvre was to have borne fruit toward noon, but in a battle one must always allow for the unforeseen. The Forty-second Di-

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vision was delayed, and only came up at five o'clock in the afternoon. Then it attacked at Connantre, and the manœuvre succeeded.

This is a summary of Foch's remarks, as reported by M. Babin, of *l'Illustration*, and in concluding, the general attributed much of the victory to his associates—General Grossetti who, by his manœuvre in the midst of the fighting, had "solved a difficult problem and accomplished a remarkable feat of arms," and General Humbert "whose courage nothing could shake, who held Mondement firmly, making it a vantage ground from which we could retrieve our imperilled fortunes."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PURSUIT AND THE CHECK

MONDEMENT on the morning after the battle was a sight which I shall never forget, because it was not only remarkable in itself, but might have been a picture of war by some great artist. The court was littered with charred beams and smoking rubbish; here and there, in a clear space, the zouaves of the victorious 77th Regiment had stacked their rifles. The château with its sturdy towers was still standing, but shells had torn yawning holes in its walls and roofs; one of the wings, including the garage, had caught fire, and all that was left of the fine limousine which I had admired three days before was a tangle of twisted metal and a heap of ashes. Abandoned machine-guns stood about, and our men were passing German rifles curiously from hand to hand. Corpses lay everywhere, especially Germans; there had not been time to bury them, as the living had to be thought of first. All the ground floor, with its drawing-rooms full of artistic trifles, had been turned into an ambulance, where the wounded lay on a little straw which the men had managed to find.

A "marmite" had fallen into the kitchen, where it had (very inappropriately) done a great deal of damage, and the dining-room had been ravaged by a shell.

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The contrast between the condition of the different rooms was perhaps what struck me more than anything else; in one everything was destroyed, or in the utmost confusion; in another the bibelots stood quietly in their accustomed places, as if nothing out of the way had happened, and a delicate pastel portrait of a pretty woman with powdered hair and rouge-heightened cheeks still smiled with the grace of another day from her gilded frame.

Leaving the château, I went along the road leading downhill, to see where the enemy's positions had been. They were a cemetery, or rather a charnel-house; Colonel Boichut's gunners had done their grim work well, and the Germans lay in groups of ten or fifteen, where they had been when struck down by our terrible shells. A little to the left of the road a whole platoon of about thirty men, deployed as sharpshooters, had begun to dig a trench; a blast of fire (of which the traces were plainly to be seen) had come, and had annihilated the whole platoon, the bodies being thrown violently forward. I could not see that they had been wounded; it was as if some evil magic had cast them suddenly from life to death, before they could even finish a half-made gesture. One man's arm was bent, with his finger on the trigger of his rifle, ready to shoot; he might almost have been a wax figure such as one sees at the Musée Grévin.

I was called away to the funeral of our chief surgeon, M. Baur, as our halt gave time enough to have it in the church of Mondement. The poor little church

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had suffered even more than the château, for two huge shells had torn open one of its walls, making a gap several metres wide. The general, his staff-officers, and the stretcher-bearers made up the mourners, and a young soldier-priest solemnly recited the prayers for the dead. Surrounded as we were by war and destruction, standing in the humble church laid open to the wind and rain, I was moved as I have seldom been at more imposing funerals.

But we were quickly called back to realities. Almost before the corps on our right had cleared up the road we were to start northward, and we soon did, following on the heels of the Germans, who were sullenly retracing the same path that they had trodden so triumphantly—the path that had not led to Paris after all!

The long days of blazing sunlight and torrid heat had been followed by gray unpleasant weather, and a drizzling rain fell from time to time. I was sent to carry some orders about noon, and had to pass through Fère-Champenoise. The fighting there had evidently been very severe; there were also many signs that the Germans had retreated in great disorder, and had indulged in a drunken orgy during their short occupation of the town. The road might have been paved with empty bottles. Some of the houses were still smoking; bodies of dead Germans were to be seen everywhere, and prisoners by the hundred; rifles, knapsacks, and all sorts of military equipments were strewn around.



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When I came out to the north of the town, on the vast plain lying on either side of the highway leading to Vertus, it was as if a panorama of the battle were spread before me. I have said before that the plain had long been called by the country people "the battle-field," and what a battle had now been waged on its wide stretches! The Germans had buried or carried off their dead, but had left ours; hundreds of French corpses lay to right and left of the road, their red trousers making bright spots of color in the fields. Almost all were stretched out with their faces to the ground; it was here that the furious attack of the Prussian Guards had driven our Eleventh Corps back.

In one of the wayside villages I found, shut up in a stable, about sixty of our men, who had been left behind when we retreated because they were too badly wounded to be moved; and there they had stayed during the whole battle. They had seen the entry of the Germans and heard the tremendous firing that went on day and night; then the Germans had decamped in much too great a hurry to think of taking them along, and at last our return had set them free again.

For two or three days after the battle our men found German soldiers emerging, from time to time, from the cellars of villages or farmhouses; they blinked in the broad daylight like moles or bats, and seemed much bewildered at finding themselves surrounded by our troops. Having drunk their fill of our wine, they had been sleeping it off comfortably near the casks;

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some of them may have found this a convenient way of escaping any further risks.

Groups of other Germans were found who had lost themselves in the woods, and were wandering to and fro like animals, living on berries and roots. I remember that one of these bands had been hiding for ten days in the forest of the Montagne de Reims; two or three times they had ventured to show themselves on its outskirts, but as our riflemen had no means of knowing what their intentions might be, they were promptly fired on. At last, half-dead with hunger, they succeeded in surrendering to some peaceful drivers of army trucks, who were mightily proud of having made such a glorious haul without striking a blow.

Our division crossed the Marne not far from Epernay, and General Foch installed his staff in the charming building of the prefecture at Châlons. The city had suffered but little, as the enemy had been forced to clear out with all speed. An important member of the German staff had established himself in the best hotel of the city, called the Haute-Mère-Dieu, which is famous for its wine-cellar and especially for a delicious red champagne.

In the middle of the night there was a tremendous knocking at every door: "Quick! make haste! everybody must be gone in an hour!" and well within the hour they were all off, leaving behind in their hurry great boxes of champagne which they had providently packed for future use. The Germans were past masters

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in the art of defensive organization, as our division found to its unpleasant surprise when we first struck their barbed wire at Beaumont-sur-Vesle, not far from Rheims. Blondlat's brigade carried Prunay after rather stiff fighting, but could get no farther.

It may be said that the whole division (and this was true of all the others) had almost reached the limit of human endurance; in many regiments the losses, both of officers and men, had been so great that very few were left. This exhaustion explains why our front was obliged to remain stationary for a time, and there were still other reasons, the most important being the shortage of munitions.

Our 75-mm. gun has a terrible appetite for shells, and when one possesses a cannon which fires so quickly and does its work so well, it was almost impossible, in the early days of the war, to resist the temptation of letting it blaze away. During the whole of the battle all our batteries had been pouring a deluge of shells on the German armies, and now our supply was almost exhausted. (The same thing has also happened, by the way, to the enemy.)

At first we were not sufficiently respectful of the barbed wire, because it was practically new to us. When one of the youngest and most enterprising of our colonels was told that his men could not advance on account of it, he exclaimed: "Stopped by some strands of wire! Let them cut it, or bend it back."

We found to our disgust that it was not easy to cut or to bend, and then began the systematic use of

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trenches, "boyaux," shelters more or less deep, barbed wire, and machine-guns, which was to become more and more important as the war went on, and was to differentiate it from wars that had been fought before our time.

Almost all our front became immovable by digging itself in; the active struggle in the open was turned into a contest for advantageous positions. We had to bid farewell to long marches and to wanderings through ever-changing scenery, when we started in the morning, without being at all certain where we should sleep at night.

Now we were in the age of steel—or rather of barbed wire—both armies were to mark time for weeks and months and years.

In order to attack the enemy's trenches, which grew stronger and better organized day by day, and to carry his ever-multiplying lines, it was absolutely necessary that we should have plenty of heavy artillery, of which we had almost none. Our staff and artillery officers were, for the most part, hypnotized by the idea that the war would be one of action, and that only the 75-mm. gun would be needed. Now, admirable as that gun is in the field, and for barrage firing, it proved to be powerless against trenches and dugouts, consequently all sorts of old models of 95's, 120's, etc., were put in use, and guns were hauled out of arsenals where they were in peaceful retirement, never, apparently, to be used again.

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But that was far from being enough. The crisis became more and more acute; the situation had to be saved by any makeshift means.

Cannon were made as fast as possible, and all over France munition factories began to pour out shells. It was a wild dance, millions of shells and also millions of money, some of which fell into the laps of a certain number of people who did not seem particularly intended to receive it—but we ought not to complain, for it was the price we paid for victory.

As the capital importance of the battle of the Marne became more and more apparent, Foch's prestige increased, for it was recognized that without his energetic persistence and, above all, without his brilliant final manoeuvre, even the successes of Maunoury and of the British and French on our right wing, could not have carried the day.

He was therefore named Grand Commander of the Legion of Honor.

The Germans had been forced to beat a retreat, and the fine offensive planned by their staff trailed its broken wings on the ground. But they were far from acknowledging defeat. Thanks to their long years of careful preparation, their resources, in men and material, were almost unlimited, and they at once organized new divisions in order to deal us new blows. From the 20th to the 24th of September they made

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a vigorous advance at Woëvre, and a wide salient into the French front by the capture of Saint Mihiel. In the presence of the Kaiser, on the 25th of September, they attempted a general attack on our front in Champagne.

I remember one striking episode in that battle. General Humbert, my chief, had been promoted, on account of his gallantry at Mondement, from the command of the Moroccan division to that of the Thirty-second Army Corps (which had just been created by joining the Forty-second Division and the Moroccan), and was one day at the fort of Montbré, not far from Rheims. As he was watching the enemy through his field-glasses, he saw a small patrol appear at the edge of a field; the men scattered, ran across the field at the double-quick, and disappeared into a ditch. In a few minutes another patrol did exactly the same. This aroused the general's curiosity, and he called the attention of his officers to this odd game, which went on at regular intervals. Suddenly Humbert remembered a report made by General Serret, our military attaché at Berlin (he was killed the next year at the head of his division in the Vosges). Serret had been allowed to watch the training of the Prussian Guard, and gave a detailed account of a method of attack which consisted of sending out small detachments of men, not important enough to attract an enemy's attention, and teaching them to approach gradually, taking advantage of every cover, until they were close to the position they intended to carry.

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General Humbert decided they were practising that lesson under his eyes.

He therefore ordered his batteries to open a barrage fire all along the further edge of the field where he had seen the patrols, in order to cut off their communication with the rear, and after this barrage had lasted for some time, our men made a rapid charge and had no difficulty in taking this detachment of the advance-guard prisoner. They were brought to us at Rilly-la-Montagne, where our headquarters were; about two hundred grenadiers, splendid looking fellows, tall and well set-up—not in the least like the miserable specimens of humanity whom we took toward the end of the war. Off they went, well guarded by an escort of dragoons, to Châlons, where Foch had his headquarters.

We used to see him from time to time during those weeks spent in the Montagne de Reims. From that hill, and from the villages which cling to its steep flank, between the forest and the vineyards, there are wonderful natural observatories, from which one can see far over the valley of the Vesle, and, on the other side of the river, the ridge of hills bearing the forts of Berru, La Pompelle, and Nogent l'Abbesse. The city of Rheims, with the towers of its cathedral, dominates the whole. One misty September afternoon we saw those towers burst into flame, savagely set on fire by German shells. All that evening and into the night the glare and smoke stained the horizon, but a far deeper stain must forever soil the memory of the Boches

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who, without any military reason, simply for the love of destruction, ruined one of our most hallowed monuments and one of the most precious jewels of our art.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE BATTLE OF FLANDERS

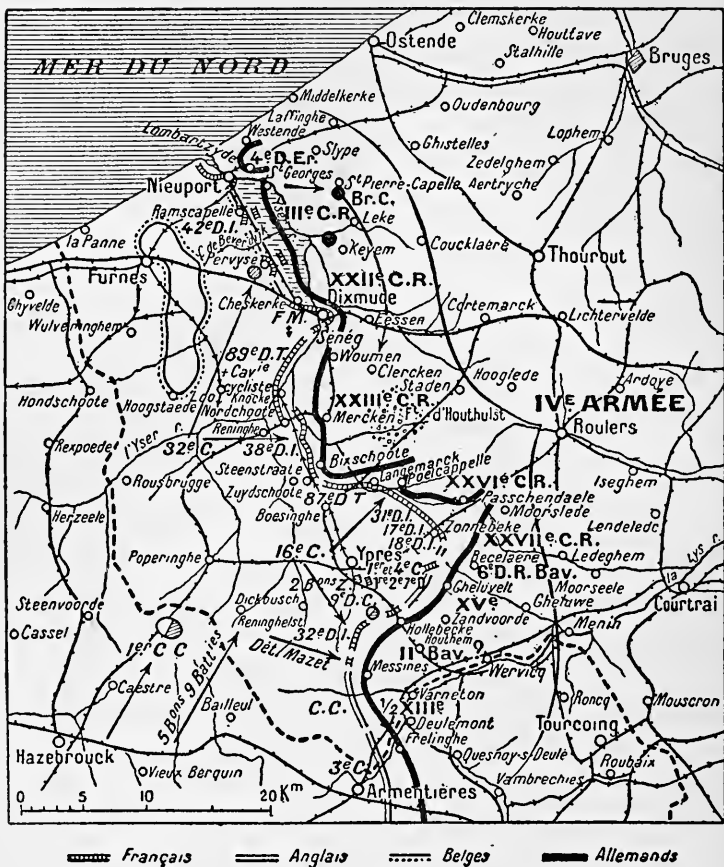
As the Germans had failed in their attempt to break through our lines in the Woëvre, east of Verdun, and their attack in Champagne was also unsuccessful, they fell back on their old plan of an enveloping movement, to be made this time by their right wing.

By a curious parallelism, the French were attempting to do exactly the same thing with their left wing; each army strove to get around the other; it was like two chess players moving their pieces at the same instant.

The map will show how much harder this concentration of forces was for the French than for the Germans. They were on the inside of a front which made almost a right angle, running from north to south, nearly to Compiègne, and from west to east, while we were on the outside; they were consequently able to move their reserves from one wing to the other in much less time than we required.

This disadvantage was minimized by the exertions of our staff, and by the excellent service rendered then, as always, by our railways; the strategic transportation, often carried on under fire, or during active engagements, surpassed any expectations which we had had in time of peace.

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The Flanders front, November 1, 1914

On the 15th of September Joffre reinforced Maunoury's army, which had moved northward, on the right bank of the Oise, and on the 20th he formed a new army to the left of Maunoury's and still farther north,

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to be commanded by General de Castelnau, who was called from Lorraine, where he had just been victorious on the Grand Couronné, above Nancy.

Another army was formed above Castelnau's, under the leadership of General de Maudhuy; north of that again came a group of territorial divisions, commanded by General Brugère and then the cavalry corps of Mitry and Conneau.

The front thus drew itself out toward the north, each of the adversaries trying to get ahead of the other; it was what was called "the race to the sea."

In the end of September Marshal French expressed his wish to bring up the British troops which had stopped in the region of the Aisne after the battle of the Marne (between the armies of Maunoury and Franchet d'Esperey) and to place them in Flanders, to the left of our army. There they would be nearer their bases of supplies, which were at Dunkerque, Calais, and Boulogne, could defend them from attack if necessary, and also stop the Germans from reaching the Channel.

This movement, which was carried out in the first weeks of October, added considerably to the problems of our transportation, which were already sufficiently difficult, and led to unavoidable delays. The British units always fought bravely, but they did not like to go into battle until they had all they needed in the way of munitions and supplies, and that was not little. Their necessities were greater than those of the French army, and their supply-trains longer in conse-

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quence, with the result that their last echelons did not get to the north until after the battle had begun.

As I have said before, it was toward the end of the afternoon, on the 4th of October, when the order came to Foch at Châlons appointing him Associate to the Commander-in-Chief, and requiring him to start at once in order to "co-ordinate" the movements of all the troops, French, British, and Belgian, between the Oise and the sea.

It was a formidable command—an almost crushing task. A considerable portion of the French army was likely to be engaged, but that was the least of his responsibilities; it developed on him to bring about harmonious action between the French, the ever-increasing British forces, and those of Belgium. There was no unity of command; theoretically the British were only under the orders of Marshal French, and the Belgians of King Albert, but, as a matter of fact, unity was established, chiefly owing to the admirable tact displayed by Foch toward both our allies. Once more Joffre had well chosen his man.

Leaving Châlons in the evening, by four o'clock in the morning Foch had reached Breteuil, the headquarters of General de Castelnau, who had not yet been informed that his subordinate of yesterday was now to command the group of armies. Together the two great chiefs went carefully over the situation. Foch's views were the same as during the battle of the Marne; Paris and Amiens were both so near that any retreat might have the possibility of disastrous consequences; all troops must hold their ground.

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The consultation was over by daybreak; Foch then went on to Aubigny, the post of command of General Maudhuy, where he informed himself still further as to details, and then returned to Doullens, where he remained with his staff until the 24th of October, when he moved to Cassel, his headquarters during the battle of Flanders.

The Belgian army had taken refuge in Antwerp; the Germans fell upon it in the end of September, annihilating its outlying forts with their heavy guns, and on the 9th of October the city was evacuated by its defenders, who made good their retreat over the narrow strip of land between the Scheldt and Zeeland, which is in Dutch territory.

Antwerp had been thought impregnable, and its swift and spectacular fall was highly stimulating to Teutonic pride and confidence. German troops hurried in pursuit of the Belgian army in the direction of Dunkerque and Calais, their object being to turn our left wing and settle themselves on the Channel coast. Once there, they flattered themselves that they could close the Channel by means of artillery, submarines, and Zeppelins; no reinforcements could be sent to France, and British trade and navigation would receive a death-blow. The German press was enthusiastic over this mighty plan, and the approaching conflict was called "the fight for Calais."

No effort was to be spared, no sacrifice would be too great, to insure such a magnificent result; one army corps after another was recklessly thrown against the feeble barrier of the Yser, in the region of Ypres, where

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the Belgian army was retreating and fighting, step by step, supported by Admiral Ronarc'h and his heroic marine fusileers, and the Seventh British Division under Sir Henry Rawlinson.

General Joffre had hoped that the Belgian army would be able to make a stand in the region of Bruges and Ghent, but its six divisions had been cruelly tried, morally even more than materially, and they continued to fall back; on the 11th of October they were in the district between Thourout and Ostend, with the evident intention of retreating as far as Calais. Most fortunately, King Albert sent word to General Joffre that he was quite willing to receive the general's instructions, on the same footing as the British commander, thus loyally accepting the co-operation which Foch had been ordered to establish.

On the 16th of October King Albert and General Foch had an interview which was of capital importance in the history of the war. The time is not yet come when all the details of that interview may be given out, although they are in my possession; it is enough to say that the King did not think his army, brave as it was, capable of holding the Yser against the German thrust; many of his units had lost most of their officers, had been sorely shaken, and were in no condition for more fighting; it was surely the part of prudence to continue the retreat.

General Foch laid before King Albert the very serious consequences which would surely follow any further loss of ground; the Yser and what was left of



*From a photograph from "L'Illustration."*

General Joffre and General Foch at Cassel.





## THE BATTLE OF FLANDERS

Belgian territory must positively be held, in order to prevent the Germans from reaching the Channel ports. These few square miles remaining to the Allies represented Belgium herself, oppressed, unhappy, but still alive, and with indomitable hope in a brighter future. Foch promised that the plucky Belgian army should be supported by the British and French armies, and in greater numbers as time went on.

King Albert, won over by the general's reasoning, ordered his troops to remain on the line of the Yser, and defend it to the last. Confidence soon returned when they felt themselves backed up by the French, who now came pouring in; the line of the Yser was formed, from Lombartzyde to Dixmude, where the Belgians were in connection with French troops, consisting of a territorial division and a brigade of marine fusileers.

The Germans first attacked at Lombartzyde, opposite Nieuport, and at Dixmude, farther south, on the 18th of October; on the 20th a violent assault on the outskirts of Dixmude was repulsed by the Belgians and the French marines. On the 21st the German pressure on Nieuport became more marked, but toward evening good news came; more French troops were arriving, General Grossetti's famous Forty-second Division, and at nightfall one of its elements, the 16th Battalion of Chasseurs à pied, swung into Furnes, where King Albert had his headquarters, its bugles and drums playing the gay marching tune of "Sidi-Brahim."

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This division was part of our army corps, the Thirty-second, commanded by General Humbert, and was with us near Rheims when the order came that it was to go to Flanders immediately. We hoped that we were soon to follow, and our hopes came true; in a few days our turn came to start for the fighting on the Yser. The troops went by train, but the staff in motor-cars, as General Humbert wished to stop at Cassel in order to receive further instructions from General Foch; we were there for several hours, and we also stopped at Rousbrugge, the headquarters of General d'Urbal, who was in command of the new draft of the Belgian army.

Here we were, as if wafted by the touch of a magic wand from dusty Champagne to muddy Flanders; it would be hard to imagine a greater change or a more striking contrast. The flat stretch between Ypres and the sea is "the low country"—lands chiefly made up of water. It was everywhere; in canals, in ditches, and in the trenches; in every hole and hollow. If one but scored the ground it welled up at once.

It is a rich and fertile country, gorged and fairly sweating with moisture, but dismally monotonous. The sameness of the landscape is unrivalled except by the uniformity of its names: Ostvleteren and Westvleteren, Boesinghe, Elverdinghe, Vlamertinghe, Pope-ringhe; and all the villages are as much alike as their names, with the same streets, the same houses, the same "estaminets."

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And yet each one of these villages is like a little city by virtue of a communal activity which one feels must have been exercised for hundreds of years; each has its own life and individuality. There is always a central square, and on this square a town hall; when the town is of any importance the Hotel de Ville, whether old or modern, strives to be beautiful, and very often succeeds.

Human industry, carried on unfalteringly from one generation to the next, gives to this country an attraction all its own. In time of peace a swarming population almost touches elbows on the hospitable Flemish soil; the hamlets and their outlying farms are set so close together that one village seems to join the next.

And if the population is dense in ordinary times, imagine what it was like when the Yser and its canal, toward Ypres, marked the temporary boundaries of Belgium which was still free. Into all these villages and farms refugees had come pouring by the thousand; houses, stables, and sheds, all were packed; there did not seem to be any corner unoccupied. The question of shelter for the French troops who also now came in thousands was a problem; however, French soldiers, both officers and men, are easy-going and good-natured beings; and the human race seems capable of indefinite compression. Even when the extreme limit had apparently been reached, one more could always be squeezed in, and in the end every one was accommodated after a fashion.

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Sluggish rivers with muddy water whose dyked borders make them look like the canals, wide or narrow, which cross and recross one another; the best roads (which are abominable) raised high and paved in the middle, but with dirt sides, impossible to use in any rainfall; the village roads, mere tracks promptly turned into quagmires by the constant rain; heavy artillery and field pieces, motor-trucks, and supply-wagons struggling through the puddles or stuck fast in the mud-holes; here and there a church tower lifting itself from the monotonous plain, or else the shaky and ill-fitting sails of some old windmill; a sky almost always low and brooding, overcast with heavy clouds, as if the sun were not able to draw all the moisture from the water-logged earth.

And then, occasionally, the sky suddenly clears, and through wide rifts in the clouds the sunlight filters delicately down and streams over the transfigured earth; the sun and the mist play at hide-and-seek, making unexpected effects of light such as one sees on the canvas of the great Dutch painters.

### THE VICISSITUDES OF THE BATTLE

It was the 28th of October when we arrived at Hoogstaede, half-way between Furnes and Ypres, and while one of our two divisions (the Thirty-eighth) was still detraining, the other (the Forty-second), which had gone before us, was actively engaged. On the two following days the Germans crossed the Yser east of

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Furnes, after very heavy artillery firing, and took the village and station of Ramscapelle from the Belgians.

The situation became critical at once, as Rams-capelle is only eight kilometres from Furnes, and if Furnes were so unlucky as to fall, the road to Dun-kerque would be open.

We were fortunate in having leaders on the spot who were men of energy and resourcefulness, and who had been in tight places before. General Grossetti immediately ordered his chasseurs to make a counter-attack on Ramscapelle.

General Humbert gave him all the battalions which could possibly be spared, as it was of almost vital importance to retake the village and drive the Germans back across the Yser; this was accomplished by our men after very stiff fighting, and we took some hundreds of prisoners into the bargain. The action was barely over when General Humbert took me with him to the village of Boitshoucke, two or three kilometres from Ramscapelle. We went through Furnes, and then took the highway to Nieuport, which was crowded with columns of troops and supply-trains, going in both directions; then we went across country over some frightfully bad roads, and at last, at a farm almost shattered by shells, we met General Grossetti and Colonel Boichut, who had handled his artillery with his usual "brio." "The job is done," said Grossetti, "my men are busy cleaning up the ditches alongside the road, and taking out Germans by the spoonful."

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The dash and gallantry of the French infantry were never more brilliantly displayed than in the fighting at Ramscapelle. It was easy to see that the Germans were trying to deal a knock-out blow, but at each critical moment they found themselves faced by forces superior in strength and intelligence, which always held and often repulsed them.

To make another attack virtually impossible, the Franco-Belgian command decided to flood the country on either side of the Yser, between Nieuport and Dixmude. In order to do this it was only necessary to leave the locks open at Nieuport and allow the sea at high tide to come up the canalized river; and, after taking expert advice, this experiment was tried with complete success; all the plain of the Yser was henceforth impassable for infantry or artillery, and the Belgian army was protected by a natural barrier behind which they could reorganize at their leisure. To make assurance doubly sure French troops were placed at Nieuport and Dixmude, where the flooded district began and ended, as those points were most susceptible of attack.

The danger toward the north was thus fended off for a time, but the Germans promptly directed their efforts southward, to Dixmude and Ypres.

At the time of their attempt to break through the Belgian lines at Ramscapelle they had also made a terrific assault on the salient held by the British at Ypres. The battle raged during the 30th and 31st of October, and the Germans came within an ace of win-

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ning it. They struck with their full force, using their stoutest and most experienced army corps; the Duke of Würtemberg had his headquarters at Thielt, and the Kaiser himself was expected there on the 30th.

This Ypres salient was exceedingly difficult to hold; as it jutted out, the enemy could rake it on three sides at once with artillery, and their guns were much heavier than ours. The rain of shells was so incessant that communications were only maintained with the utmost difficulty; all reinforcements and supplies had to be brought up during the night.

In the morning of the 29th the First British Corps was ferociously attacked and pushed back, losing important positions; General Haig, who was in command, ran great risk of having both his wings turned, and Rawlinson's Third Cavalry Division was badly knocked about.

This was enough to make the situation exceedingly serious, indeed almost desperate. Ypres was in imminent danger from the south, and the Allied troops, who were east of the city, knew that if the danger increased their communications would be threatened. More of the enemy could be seen, coming from the direction of Comines, and everything pointed to a still stronger offensive on the next day. When Foch received this bad news, at five o'clock in the afternoon of the 30th, he jumped into his motor-car and hurried to Montreuil to see Marshal French, who was in bed, as by that time it was one o'clock in the morning.

Captain Meunier-Surcouf, one of General Foch's

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aides-de-camp, has given a detailed account of their interview, which is quoted by M. René Puaux. Foch offered the marshal all his available reserves: the troops of the Thirty-second Division (scarcely detrained) were to be sent to Ypres, and besides that, troops from the Ninth Corps, part of Bernard's brigade and five battalions, three batteries and six squadrons of cavalry, commanded by General Moussy, would be sent toward Becelaere and Hollebecke.

The next morning (the 31st), things grew worse instead of better. The mighty offensive which had been foreseen came off, and the First British Corps lost Hollebecke and Zandvoorde altogether, as well as Gheluvelt on the right, and Messines to the left. A gap was opened in the British lines, which General Moussy, commanding the French force, managed to fill up by means of workmen, orderlies, cooks, or whatever material he could get hold of. But, farther to the east, the front of the First British Division was broken; a whole regiment of the Seventh Division was surrounded; the general in command of the First Division was wounded, and five of his officers killed around him. The Germans had never been nearer winning the war.

About two o'clock in the afternoon Marshal French went to Hooge with General Sir Douglas Haig. As he wrote afterward, "it was the most critical moment which we had to undergo during that great battle." His troops had been overwhelmed and could do no more; he had no more reserves to draw upon; he



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thought seriously therefore of ordering a retreat, and giving up Ypres.

From the height of his observatory at Cassel, General Foch had been watching the fluctuations and vicissitudes of the battle with the closest attention, and, following his usual habit of going to and fro along the front, he had gone that day to General d'Urbal's post of command, at Vlamertinghe. It was late in the afternoon, and General Dubois, who commanded the Ninth Corps, had just brought to his two chiefs the report that the British were giving way and of the grave consequences which might ensue.

At that moment Marshal French happened to be passing through the village on his way to his post of command at Bailleul. A French officer, Captain Jamet, took it upon himself to stop the marshal's motor-car and to tell him that General Foch was there, whereupon the marshal at once went in to see him. Marshal French explained the conditions of his army, and said frankly that he felt obliged to consider the necessity of a retreat. Foch opposed this in the strongest terms; the capture of Ypres would be a great moral victory for the Germans and should therefore be prevented at all costs; besides that, the few roads leading from the city were already so crowded that a precipitate retreat would probably mean that the enemy would be able to take many prisoners and a quantity of supplies. It was therefore most necessary to hold out, especially as the French reinforcements would come in greater numbers; battalions were

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arriving every day, and they should all be sent to shore up the British lines and stop their gaps. "A leader," said Foch, "should never give the order to retreat. Troops have the task of holding a position; it may be that they will have to fall back when they can do so no longer, but it should not be by virtue of an order." Little by little the marshal was won over by this firm confidence on Foch's part and allowed himself to be convinced. It is said (and the report has come from several different sources) that Foch with his own hand wrote the message ordering continued resistance, cost what it might; French then signed it, and it was immediately sent to General Sir Douglas Haig.

Victory was the result of that decision, and by his invincible energy Foch had once again saved the situation. His confidence in this case came from his clear vision as to the real condition of the German army. He knew that such heavy attacks could not be kept up indefinitely, as its reserves were being quickly exhausted, and that if the Allies could hold on a few days longer the tide would turn in their favor.

In the meantime the battle of Ypres went on, with the British and French troops fighting side by side, many of their units being mingled. It was a Franco-British mosaic, and as new battalions arrived they were thrown into the fiery furnace at once.

By the 5th of November previous conditions might be considered as re-established, and Joffre sent his congratulations to Foch in these words: "The opera-

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tions carried on under your direction have completely outmanœuvred the enemy and nullified his offensive movement on Ypres, notwithstanding his accumulation of forces in that region."

From the 6th to the 15th the German staff collected all the troops on which it could lay hands for a last effort, and as Foch well knew that the best method of defense is to attack, he ordered local offensives in various places. The town of Dixmude, on the right bank of the Yser, was heroically held by a mere handful of marine fusileers, who were being more and more hardly pressed by the enemy; to give them more breathing space, and enlarge our front there, General Humbert ordered an attack on the château of Dixmude, which stood about fifteen hundred metres south of the town.

By a great piece of good luck I was able to be in that attack. I spent the afternoon on the banks of the Yser in the trenches among the chasseurs and marines, with their officers, and night was falling as I went back through the poor little town, amid a frightful din from heavy artillery firing, the crackling of infantry rifles, and the tapping of machine-guns, which sounds like the grinding of a coffee-mill.

On my way I left the highroad from Furnes at Alveringen, and near Oudecapelle I found the marine fusileers, and was in the firing zone. Batteries of heavy and light artillery are close to us on every side, their lightnings tearing through thick fog, under a sky like melted soot; the challenge of our guns provokes an

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uncanny sputtering followed by a sudden rending noise, as a German shell explodes.

Here is the bridge of Dixmude, and the motor-car must be left behind, for the enemy is only a thousand metres away. At the end of the bridge, which had been hastily mended after its destruction by the German artillery, two marines with fixed bayonets bar the way. Let us leave Dixmude for the present and turn to the right on the road which follows the Yser. The rain-soaked clay soil sticks like glue, and one must pick one's way between crater holes. Trenches run alongside the paved road, where the marines eat, drink, sleep, fight, and die, in mud four feet deep. This lot is resting with entire unconcern, as it is the turn of their comrades across the river to do the fighting. Most of them are gathered around the fires where the evening meal is cooking; some are cleaning their rifles; others are crouched down writing post-cards with stiff and unaccustomed fingers—cards that will start to-morrow to reassure anxious families on the gray Breton coast or the smiling shores of the Mediterranean. A young officer in khaki is drinking black coffee from a tin cup and evidently enjoying himself hugely—he turns out to be a prince of the house of Orleans-Braganza, attached to the British staff.

The river bank is ploughed and torn by shells, and the earth turned over as if by some geological upheaval; many well-to-do citizens of Dixmude had their villas and pleasure houses beside the stream, and these now offer a suggestive study of the variety of

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damage to be done by a bombardment. Sometimes the roof is broken in; sometimes the whole front stripped off; again, the house has been split from top to bottom, and one sees its drawing-room and bed-chambers, with their furniture and even ornaments, beside a gaping hole. The effect is so unexpected and often so grotesque that one would be inclined to smile if there were not such a lump in one's throat.

Here is Admiral Ronarc'h, buttoned up to the chin in a civilian's black greatcoat, standing calmly and silently with his officers at the end of a "boyau," looking at some chasseurs crossing a foot-bridge on their way to attack the château. General Grossetti is directing the assault, with Colonel Boichut (whose batteries, a little to the rear, are making an infernal din) beside him. The general, who is watching the firing through his field-glasses with his elbows on the muddy parapet of the trench, cries out: "You've got the range! Keep that elevation! It's just what we want!"

We can see our shells bursting on the walls of the château opposite us, a thousand metres away. The chasseurs, with their section commanders, trot briskly over the little bridge, and once on the other side, deploy in open lines. The fog closes in, thicker and thicker; an icy drizzle envelops everything; the surroundings are unspeakably dreary—but every one hardens himself to stick it out, and so the fight goes on.

The light was failing rapidly, and as I wanted to see Dixmude before it was quite dark, I retraced my

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steps along the Yser to the bridge. The sentries allowed me to pass, but warned me against following the open street at the other end, as the German machine-guns were at the railway-station, only eight hundred metres off, ready to open their spitting fire on any one rash enough to offer a target.

During the war I have gone from Nieuport to Bacarat, and from the North Sea to the Vosges, seeing everywhere wrecked cities and bombarded towns, but Dixmude was the most pitiful of them all. Not a house had escaped, not a street but was pitted with craters—and such craters! I came across one so enormous that I was curious enough to measure it with my walking-stick; it was eight metres in diameter, and three metres and a half deep—big enough to hide an army wagon with its horses, or bury a whole squad of men. In the gloomy winter twilight the little city, suddenly caught in the whirlwind of war, was as pitiable as an abandoned corpse; there were no civilians about, and very few soldiers; here and there a few marines came out of cellars, and there was a dressing-station for the wounded. Only a portion of the town hall was left; the belfry was still standing, pierced with great holes.

A few days later the Germans took Dixmude; Admiral Ronarc'h stopped them there by blowing up the bridge over the Yser.

As despite all their efforts and their bloody sacrifices the Germans had not been able to take Ypres, they revenged themselves by setting it on fire.

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Two months earlier I had witnessed the wanton incendiarism of Rheims cathedral, and by chance I now saw the destruction of that marvel of old Flemish architecture and pride of the city, the Cloth Hall.

A hard frost had suddenly fallen on the great plain of Flanders; the sun shone brightly from a clear sky on the expanse of snow-covered fields and ice-gripped canals; firing still went on all along the line.

I took advantage of a few hours' leisure to make a visit to my old friend Colonel Cros, who had the Moroccan brigade, at his post of command, a farm north of Ypres and close to Boesinghe, which he shared with a swarming mass of zouaves, sharpshooters, and Belgian refugees, to say nothing of cows and pigs.

The colonel, whose temper nothing could ruffle, had invited me to lunch with him in one of the two rooms which were all he had for kitchen, dining-room, bedroom, and office, and we talked over old times together.

"How long ago it seems," he said smiling, "since our voyage to India on that luxurious liner, and our talks on deck, and the dinners and balls night after night, with the pretty women in evening dress!"

As I went back along the highway to Ypres my attention was attracted by a dense column of rising smoke. Astonished and uneasy, I made my way to the city as fast as I could. Its outskirts were deserted. In one of the suburbs I had to slacken my pace at a railway crossing because a quantity of wire had been torn from the telegraph-poles and was trailing on the ground, and as I passed an old man, standing in a door-

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way, said in a tone of infinite sadness: "They have set fire to the Cloth Hall."

When I reached the principal square, I saw the deed in all its horror. The interior of the building was already a furnace; the walls, with their gracefully curved gothic arches, and lace-like window-frames, their statues and the slender towers at their corners, were still standing—but for how long? The roof and vault had fallen in, and the mighty framework was burning fiercely. It was like those of our old cathedrals, a forest of timber, a network of great beams skilfully fitted one into the other by mediæval craftsmen. The German incendiaries, who made such destruction a specialty, knew that the dry wood, seasoned by centuries, was highly inflammable, and here, as at Rheims, their efforts were chiefly centred on the framework.

They began their work about nine o'clock in the morning. The tall watch-tower, the square tower of the Cloth Hall, and the belfry of the cathedral made excellent landmarks, and for two hours without stopping they poured shells upon the same spot, until at last they saw fire break out and smoke rise against the sky. Then the bombardment stopped instantly; its work was done; the Cloth Hall was in flames, which was all the Germans wanted, and they were not minded to waste ammunition, especially big shells, which were expensive.

They chose the time for their ignoble work with admirable judgment. During the preceding days the dampness and persistent rain would have hindered the work of their guns, and they might not have suc-



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ceeded, so they waited until the weather was ideal for starting a conflagration, with a high wind to fan the flames.

The ordinary mind is utterly unable to imagine a mentality capable of planning and carrying out such wanton destruction for no military purpose, but simply in order to ruin a beautiful and venerable work of art. For centuries Flanders has been a battleground; French, Germans, English, and Spaniards have disputed its soil and fought on it to the death, but the ancient monuments which were its chief adornment were spared until now, only to fall victims to skilful and malevolent barbarism at last.

It was exceedingly difficult to do anything to check the disaster; the cold had been bitter the night before, and all the water-pipes were frozen. The blaze grew fiercer, and as we stood in the bright winter sunshine we looked through the gothic windows at a gigantic brazier. The flames gnawed at the old stones; from a thousand cracks in the façade they licked the statues with fiery tongues; each figure seemed to be bound to some infernal stake for torment. Every few minutes one of the great beams of the framework, burned through, fell into the brazier with a loud crash. Clouds of sparks flew high into the air, and it was not easy to cross the square on the side to which they were borne by the wind; although I ran, my cloak almost caught fire. These sparks and bits of burning wood fell on the roofs of all the surrounding houses, and soon the square was threatened from all sides.

Then came the turn of the cathedral, with its timber

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framework. First we saw a little patch of red on the roof; this spread rapidly, and soon flames burst out. Presently a man came running in all haste: "The church is on fire, and the pictures will be burned. For heaven's sake, help me to save them!"

A few hundred French soldiers who were hurriedly called in from the neighborhood (where fighting was still going on) worked like demons and performed impossible feats in attempting to control the flames. Obedient to the slightest gesture of their officers, some made a chain of buckets, others manned the pumps, while others, again, boldly perched on shaky ladders, threw jets of water into the body of the church.

But all their efforts were useless, and the only thing to be done was to get all that was recoverable out of some parts of the Cloth Hall which had not yet caught fire. Our brave little soldiers were wonderfully quick and intelligent at moving the contents of the library, and the archives; I saw one small *chasseur à pied* staggering under a pile of old registers which were certainly taller than he.

"Now for the church!" cried the major. "We must get everything valuable out safely before evening!" The soldiers rushed into the sanctuary, where it was already dusk, and the heavy ciborium and massive silver candelabra from the choir were carried out on their shoulders.

It was horribly sad to see all these sacred things torn from the places where they had stood for hundreds of years and hurried into the dark street. One of the burgomaster's assistants took charge of the

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moving as well as he could, and all that could be saved from the church or the Cloth Hall was heaped pell-mell in an adjacent cellar.

Such outbursts of rage always betrayed failure on the part of the Germans; whenever matters were going badly with them they burned a cathedral.

They had lost the battle of Flanders, and little by little a lull spread over that part of the front; the Kaiser went back, and the docile Teutonic press announced that the General Staff had never intended to take Calais.

The German rush to the sea had been stopped and the battle of the Yser won. Although it lasted for weeks instead of days, it had, like the battle of the Marne, some especially critical periods which may be called its *moments*. One was the interview between King Albert and Foch when the Belgians were falling back; others were the conversations between Foch and Marshal French when the British were so hard pushed, and on these decisive occasions Foch again showed the same qualities and temperament as at the Marne. Again he had a clear insight into the enemy's plans and a definite idea of his resources, and again he had firm faith in the courage and morale of the army under his orders, and knew what he might safely expect from it. His optimism springs from intelligence, and this, added to his energy of character, makes the most fitting combination for a military genius.

It would be difficult to overstate the sufferings of the Allied troops during the battle of the Yser, and im-

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possible to exaggerate their heroism; there was nothing like it except during the siege of Verdun.

The men lived in trenches full of icy water; those who emerged looked like great lumps of blackish glue, in which one could just make out something vaguely resembling a human countenance. In many places the lines were only thirty or forty metres apart, and the fire from snipers and machine-guns did not let up for a moment. Sleep was almost impossible, as the Germans made night like day with an incredible number of star-shells, in order to throw grenades into our trenches. Incessant watchfulness was imperative. Yet in spite of their wretched surroundings the morale of the troops was never higher. I often questioned our chaplain, who was better informed than any one else, as hundreds of soldiers spoke to him freely, and I was deeply touched by what he told me. Life for all was on an exalted plane, but those leading it were sublimely unconscious that they were doing anything out of the common. Plotinus, the philosopher, said: "We live and move in divinity" ("in eo movemur et sumus"), and his words apply admirably to our men.

I had been told by the staff to make notes of any instances of exceptional bravery which might come to my knowledge as I went to and fro along the lines; there were so many that choice became very difficult. It was thus that I heard the story of the zouave of "Drie Grachten" (which has since become legendary) on the very day when it happened. During a night

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attack on that part of the front the Germans, with their usual treachery, had dressed a number of their men in uniforms taken from our dead zouaves, and they pushed ahead of them, at the point of the bayonet, a zouave whom they had taken prisoner, ordering him to call out to our soldiers: "Don't shoot! we are French!"

The Germans crept closer and closer to our trenches; our men, thinking they saw our uniform in the dim light, hesitated to shoot, when a voice rang out: "Fire, in God's name! They're Boches!" The answering volley killed all the Germans, and also the heroic zouave, a worthy descendant of the Chevalier d'Assas,<sup>1</sup> who thus laid down his life for his comrades.

Not far from there two zouaves, the sole survivors of their squad, were guarding the end of a trench on which the Germans were directing an infernal fire. One was killed; the other was ordered by his section chief to retire, to which he answered: "But if I go, lieutenant, who'll keep my loophole?"

During one of the tours of inspection which I made with General Humbert I noticed an old trooper who looked as if he might be the father, or even the grandfather, of his comrades. The general called him out of the ranks and questioned him, when it came out that he had been employed in the postal service in Algeria and had volunteered on the first day of the war, although he was fifty-five years old, and was now

<sup>1</sup> A captain in the regiment of Auvergne, who did the same thing when surrounded by enemies in 1760, during the Seven Years' War.

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serving in the same zouave regiment as his son. He had been constantly at the front and in the firing-line, and was a shining example of courage, endurance, and good spirits.

The recapture of the *Maison du Passeur*, or ferryman's house, has already added several more stories to what is now legend, and will be tradition.

This house stood on the left bank of the Yser canal, not far from Poesele. After a violent attack the Germans had succeeded in crossing the canal and gaining a foothold on the opposite side; they held on tooth and nail to the *Maison du Passeur*, from which it seemed impossible to dislodge them. As it was clear that definite information must be obtained regarding the exact position of the machine-guns with which they had surrounded the house before any attack could have even a chance of success, a non-commissioned officer volunteered to make a reconnaissance. He started at night, wearing the cape of a dead German, in order to cheat the keen eyes of their sentries, and with infinite pains succeeded in getting within a few metres of the enemy's trenches. Suddenly a sentry who had been hidden behind an embankment called out, "Who goes there?" and covered him with a rifle. Our man had a sudden inspiration; he whispered, "Ss-sh!" put his finger on his lip to enjoin silence, and pointed to the French positions. The sentry lowered his rifle, certain that he had to do with a German officer out reconnoitring; the plucky Frenchman crawled away, and then by a sharp turn

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came back beside the German trenches. A second sentry challenged him, and a second time he repeated his bluff, with the same success as before. When he had found out all he wanted to know, he started back to our lines; a third sentry, seeing something moving in the darkness far off, called, "Who goes there?" This time our daredevil was at a safe distance, so he shouted Cambronne's famous word at the top of his lungs, and when he told the story afterward he added: "I was never so happy in my life as when I was able to call that out to the Boches." Cambronne would have been proud of him!

The victory in Flanders had important results. The German staff used up its finest shock troops, including newly organized divisions; although it was by no means at the end of its resources it realized that no decision desirable from a military point of view could now be reached on the western front. Its plans were therefore modified, if not entirely changed, and for the ensuing fifteen months the attitude of the Germans in Belgium and France was solely defensive, except for some severe local attacks, especially in the Argonne forest. Their chief exertions were made to the eastward, in the Balkans and against Russia.

The French and the British, who had not been prepared for war because they did not desire it, were not slow to take advantage of the precious time gained. The British, by a prodigious effort for which they can

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never be given too much credit, organized a powerful and well-trained army, while the French concentrated on making war material, particularly the heavy artillery which they lacked.

It is clear that the battle of the Yser was won by Foch's influence over the Belgian and British leaders, as well as by the heroism of the Allied troops. The *sole command*, which became more and more needed, and which took so long to concede, was exercised by Foch during this conflict, either directly through his orders or through essential decisions which he inspired.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE FRENCH OFFENSIVE OF 1915

AFTER Germany reversed her strategic plan, and turned her attention to the east, Hindenburg's star began to rise above the horizon. He was a specialist as to the Russian front, and that only; he knew the joints in the Russian armor, and where to strike. His blows were heavy; the crushing Galician campaign in the spring of 1915 was followed by the autumn campaign in the Balkans.

It must be acknowledged that the diplomatists of the Allies made grievous mistakes in regard to the eastern situation; their vacillating policy and their obstinacy in refusing to see matters and men as they really were, made the German successes, both political and military, relatively easy. While Sir Edward Grey, M. Sazonoff, and M. Delcassé flattered themselves that they had won over Bulgaria by futile concessions, King Ferdinand, most knavish of all Coburgs, had already thrown in his lot with the Central Powers. Serbia was treacherously attacked and wiped off the map in a few weeks.

Meanwhile the French and the British on the western front went on preparing for a war of endurance. In the spring of 1915 the French made a local offensive in Artois which was a brilliant success on the first

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day, but nothing came of it. The front on which we attacked was too narrow, and we had not enough reserves. This tentative effort served to show the complexity of the problem with which we were faced; we had not only to break through strongly fortified lines, but to widen the gap thus made and force a decision. It took three more years of constant experiment, helped toward the end by new war machines, before the problem was finally solved.

(The fighting in Artois drew attention to the brilliant military qualities of a leader who continued to distinguish himself—General Pétain.)

In September, 1915, a second attempt was made on the western front; this time the French attacked in Champagne, while the British executed a secondary movement in Artois. The staff had had ample time to study the situation; the front was wider, more troops were employed, and we had plenty of heavy guns and munitions.

From a tactical point of view this offensive was eminently successful; 25,000 prisoners were taken, including 350 officers, 150 guns, and a large amount of supplies, but the strategic situation was unchanged.

Toward the end of 1916 the Germans perceived that their triumphs in the east and against Russia, however striking and important they might be on the war map, were not bringing them a day nearer the end of hostilities. Their principal adversaries were in the west, and until they were beaten nothing could be accomplished. The Teutonic staff had been following

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the line of least resistance for a year; it now found itself obliged to return, whether it would or not, to the plan made at the beginning of the campaign.

It should be noticed that these staff plans were not remarkable for their continuity; on the contrary, they were frequently changed during the course of the war.

In any conflict between Germany and France two courses were clearly indicated: one was to throw an immense army into our territory and crush us quickly; the other, to attack Russia first and put her out of the game before she had time to mobilize, after which all the German forces could be turned against France.

The first course was followed in the beginning of the war; the Kaiser had declared that France was "the chief enemy," and must be annihilated speedily in order to end the war, according to promise, in a few weeks, or, at latest, a few months. France's most vulnerable point, the heart of her body politic, was Paris; the capital once lost, further resistance must be feeble, and the war could soon be closed out. So the Germans reasoned.

Violation of Belgian neutrality was the immediate result of this haste to invade France, as the way through Belgium was both short and easy.

General Joffre and the heroic French army saved our country at the battle of the Marne. The Germans fell back about sixty kilometres all along their line, and dug themselves into positions decided upon beforehand. The war of movement, on the Napoleonic

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model, was changed almost instantly into one in which each combatant in turn was in a state of siege.

Even after their defeat at the Marne the Germans held obstinately to their plan of conquering France first, and two weeks later they made a vigorous offensive in the Woëvre, hoping to take Verdun by a flank movement. (It is important to remember that from the beginning of the war they had looked longingly at that fortress.)

A month later came another great offensive; the battle of the Yser was to allow them to turn the flank of the Franco-British armies, and to settle themselves at Calais, in order to blockade England with their submarines. That project also failed completely, and as their leaders had been spendthrifts of human life, repeatedly throwing their men against our lines in solid formation, it was necessary to reorganize and add to their forces, and also to augment their supply of artillery and munitions. This they did during the winter of 1914-15, but when spring came they changed their plan and their great offensive was then directed against Russia.

It is at first a little difficult to see why this should have been, as France, "the chief enemy," was still unconquered. The reasons for the change were both military and political. Thanks to their marvellous system of espionage, the Germans knew that the Russians were short of rifles and munitions, and the well-provided troops of the Central Powers had nothing to fear from that quarter. On the political side,

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the situation in Austria-Hungary was peculiar. The Russian armies reached the southern slope of the Carpathians, not far from the plain of Hungary, just as Italy went into the war. The Hungarians, an energetic race, had a fitting representative, Count Stephen Tisza, at the head of their government, and he was chosen to speak for his people. He went to Berlin and to the Great Headquarters, and told the Kaiser and his ministers that unless aid were given promptly Hungary might be obliged to make a separate peace in order to escape invasion.

Taken together these reasons decided the Austro-German offensive in Galicia, soon followed by a general offensive on the whole eastern front. These produced results which were important and not to be minimized, but were also in no way decisive.

And decisive results were what the Austro-Germans sought. It was all very well to occupy cities and provinces, to advance hundreds of kilometres and take thousands of prisoners, but their real object was to destroy the Russian army and force Russia to make an ignominious peace, or at least so cripple her that she should no longer be capable of playing any considerable part in the war. They did not get what they wanted. The Russian army fell back, but it was not routed, nor was it incapable of further resistance. It is true that German military critics asserted the contrary; they declared loudly that the Russians were thenceforth negligible as opponents, but later events proved them in the wrong.

Prince von Bülow, a man of great ability, had warned his fellow countrymen of what might happen. In a book on international politics, published some years before the war, he used this characteristic expression: "Fighting the Russians is like pounding a pillow."

The offensive against the Russians was followed in the autumn of 1915 by one in the Balkans, and here again the Germans were influenced by politics. They wanted the co-operation of the Bulgarians in order to open a way through to Constantinople; the Turkish army needed supplies, and the German people needed their morale strengthened by the idea of an irresistible push toward the east. The attack on Serbia succeeded, partly owing to the assistance cheerfully rendered by Bulgaria.

Here again the outcome was important but not final. No amount of success in the east could offset the continued resistance of the French and British armies, and even in the east Germany had not fully attained her end. The clear political vision and stubborn energy of M. Briand decided France to keep a tight hold on Salonica, and England, at first doubtful as to this policy, was finally won over to his view. Troops of both countries fortified the surrounding country, and the Austro-Germans and Bulgarians confessed their weakness by not daring to make any serious attack.

These Oriental excursions had given the Allied armies in France and Belgium a whole year, as I have

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said, during which they had diligently added to their numbers and improved their equipment. Now, whether they would or not, the Germans had to face the essential situation of the war; they must beat the Allies in the west or acknowledge defeat.

As 1915 drew to its close the desire to put an end to the conflict increased as Germany felt the pressure of the food blockade; the staff therefore took up the plan which had been laid aside, and a great offensive in France was decided upon. This offensive was to be made while it was still winter, because the weather made military operations on the eastern front impracticable, and also because, if it turned out well, the Allies would be unable to attack in the spring of 1916. The time being settled, it only remained for the German staff to choose the place.

## CHAPTER IX

### VERDUN

It is easy to see why the Germans should have chosen Verdun for their point of attack. On the north the French line made an abrupt elbow that was almost a right angle, and then curved south in the direction of St. Mihiel, leaving Verdun in a pronounced salient which gave a chance for artillery fire and infantry assault from three sides at once.

The plan was to make a vigorous frontal attack first, to break the French centre; that done, both wings of the German army would attack at the same time, and envelop our lines in a convergent movement from which there could be no escape; any attempt at retreat must be a rout.

This was a classic manœuvre of the German High Command. It had been conceived and carried out during the brilliant offensive in the east in 1915, when Marshal Mackensen broke the centre of the Russian front on the Dunajec, after a deluge of shells, and then brought up his right and left wings; the Russians had to beat a precipitate retreat to avoid being surrounded.

Verdun offered exceptional advantages for an operation of this sort. The Meuse, running from south to north, cut the French position in two, and, although the stream itself is only about sixty metres wide, it



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usually overflows its banks in winter, inundating the adjacent meadows. This would be a serious obstacle to a hastily retreating army, especially if one or more of the few bridges were destroyed by shells.

The Germans also hoped to profit greatly by the network of railways which was much more extensive on their side than on ours.

In view of the "kolossal" result to which the German staff confidently looked forward, a new shock army had been organized, composed of four army corps of two divisions each, with three regiments to a division. Gaps in the ranks of these chosen corps were filled from young soldiers of the 1916 class, who had had a thorough military training; they were given extra rations and allowed to rest for a long time before they were brought to the front. The artillery preparation was equally careful; all the heavy guns which had been in use on the Serbian front were brought back, and part of those on the Russian.

On the 14th of February the Kronprinz made a proclamation to the troops under his orders which began with these words: "I, William, see the German Fatherland forced to take the offensive." This screed was brought to the French by three Alsatian deserters, and its terms confirmed by Polish deserters a few days later.

The Germans fully expected an important, if not absolutely decisive result from their carefully made plans. The whole French line was to be subjected to a terrific bombardment, after which the shock troops

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would hurl themselves on our centre, and as we fell back their wings would close in on us. We should be obliged to evacuate the Verdun salient in all haste, and as the bridges over the Meuse would have been swept away by their artillery our troops on the right bank would find retreat almost impossible; if their right and left wings came up in time it might be that two or even three of our army corps would be caught as if in a mighty net.

That part of our line had been relatively quiet for some months, but at four o'clock in the morning of the 21st of February the sleeping city was awakened by the firing of a heavy gun by way of announcement of what was to follow. The real bombardment began soon after seven o'clock, with a shower of heavy shells all along our line (according to schedule) and also asphyxiating and lachrymatory bombs. After an hour of this intense firing all telephonic communication along our front was out of commission and connections had to be kept up by means of runners. Our first lines were almost beaten flat by this rain of steel; trenches, parapets, shelters, no matter how solidly built, crumbled away like dry earth; whole groups of our men were crushed to death and buried in ruins.

At five o'clock on the afternoon of the same day the first infantry attack was hurled against our centre—also according to plan. On the 22d the fighting went on fiercely, in bitter cold and snow, and our first line had to be evacuated.

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For the next two days the German advance continued and by the evening of the 24th our situation seemed desperate, but that night the enemy was checked. General de Castelnau arrived, with orders from the generalissimo—peremptory orders to stop the German push at whatever cost. The defense of Verdun was to be made from the right bank of the Meuse; no falling back on that side was to be thought of.

The intense cold still continued; our advancing columns could hardly see through the whirling snow. General Pétain came up with reinforcements, taken from some of our best troops; by long-distance shelling and terrific barrages the enemy tried to prevent them from reaching us, but nothing could hold our men back; each one felt the vital importance of his task. A human barrage was to be formed between Bezonvaux and Louvemont; the Twentieth Corps, commanded by General Balfourier, had already planted one of its divisions on the right bank of the river.

Two French brigades arrived in motor-trucks, and their generals went to the corps commander, who was impatiently waiting for reinforcements. "The cold in the trucks last night was frightful," said the generals; "our men are almost frozen." "They have no time to freeze," was the answer; "they must be ready within the hour to stop the Germans"—and without a murmur the half-frozen men threw themselves into the fight and did what was expected of them.

(This answer reminds one of Foch's well-known

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reply during the battle of the Marne when one of his subordinates reported that his corps was too tired to advance.)

The principal field of the great conflict was the fort and village of Douaumont, which is to the battle of Verdun what the marshes of Saint Gond and the château of Mondement were to the battle of the Marne. By five o'clock in the afternoon of the 25th the village seemed to be surrounded by Germans, but a vigorous counter-attack by French zouaves and sharpshooters cleared them out, and when night fell the French held the village and the hills to the eastward.

That afternoon was the culminating point of the battle. For several days things had gone badly for us, but when they were at their worst a supreme effort on our part again weighed the scale down on our side.

The Germans had not gained any decisive result from their desperate struggle on the right bank of the Meuse. It is true that they had been able to carry the first two lines of the French positions, but at the third their advance was definitely stopped, and they were forced to send their shock troops to the rear, which proves that their losses were enormous. Out of the three shock corps which led the attack, the Third and Eighteenth were completely exhausted, and were reorganized by new drafts from Germany, of whom half were recruits of the class of 1916.

As Verdun had not been crushed by the stunning blow on which the Germans had counted, they settled down to a war of attrition; one division after another

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came rolling up, and the same thing happened on our side; each combatant tried to wear the other out.

Between the 30th of March and the 8th of April the Germans, after repeated attacks, succeeded in driving in our first line which ran along the Forges brook, on the left bank of the Meuse, and advanced until they were at the foot of the principal French positions.

Then, on the 9th of April, came the great battle of Mort-Homme. This was a general engagement, and one of the most violent, but it failed completely, and the next day General Pétain issued a congratulatory order to his troops, which ended thus: "Honor to you all! The Germans will doubtless attack again; let us work and be vigilant that we may repeat yesterday's success. Courage! We'll get them!" (on les aura).

From March 3d to May 8th the enemy made many fierce attacks in order to occupy the hill known as "côte 304," and on the 7th of June the fort of Vaux was taken. On the 23d a massed attack was made by seventy or eighty thousand Germans on a front five kilometres long, on the right bank of the river, running from "côte 321" to La Laufée.

These fierce attacks and counter-attacks, these positions taken and lost and taken again, this implacable fury and dogged obstinacy, are what especially characterize the long battle of Verdun.

To conquer means to impose one's will on an adversary, and if one looks at the combat from that point of view it seems more and more like a complete victory for the French, and it is also an exclusively French victory, for we fought alone.

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It is impossible to overestimate its importance in the history of the war. It was a life-and-death struggle for four months, in which both sides put forth all their strength. The Germans were willing to pay any price for Verdun, and it must be acknowledged that they got within a few kilometres of their goal. But the citadel remained inviolate; the French had said, "They shall not pass!" and they did not.

While the heroic defenders of Verdun stood at bay, wearing out, one after another, the best divisions of the German army, the Allied staff had leisure to prepare and combine a new offensive movement.

The battle of the Somme, which was soon to begin, is in direct and close connection with the battle of Verdun, and it is impossible to understand one without knowing something of the other.

When the fighting on the Somme had been going on for a short time the generalissimo, Joffre, issued the following order of the day to his troops: "The plan decided upon by the Allies in council is now being carried out. Soldiers of Verdun, this is owing to your heroic resistance; without it our success is impossible, and upon it our future victories rest; it has created a situation in the theatre of European war from which the ultimate triumph of our cause shall speedily come forth."

## CHAPTER X

### THE SOMME

WHILE the battle of Verdun was raging, many "chamber strategists" could not understand why the French staff did not try to divert the Germans from their push by making an attack at some other point on the French front, and it is now no secret that the Commander-in-Chief of the British armies offered their assistance if such an attack were made; in fact, Mr. Asquith said so officially in the House of Commons. But General Joffre stoutly refused to be drawn into a premature offensive, before he had the necessary forces and supplies; had he done so he would only have played into the enemy's hands. Many councils of war were held in Paris by the Allied leaders, and the plans for a united movement were carefully matured.

In the meantime the Austrians, feebly imitating their stronger ally, wanted to have a little Verdun of their own. They invaded the Trentino with a large force and much heavy artillery, but the Italian staff was rich in reserves, and stopped them short before they could get into the rich Lombard plain. The only real result of their offensive was one they certainly had not foreseen—the Russian armies fell suddenly upon the Volhynian and Galician front and drove it in.

While this Russian movement was in full swing the

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French and British staffs decided that the time had come for an offensive on the Somme.

In his capacity of associate to the generalissimo and commander of the northern armies, General Foch was to collaborate with General Sir Douglas Haig in organizing the movement and directing it on the spot, thus playing again the part of co-ordinator of the Allied forces, which he had filled so admirably during the battle of the Yser. Here, however, the conditions were reversed, in that it was not the Germans but the Allies who should attack.

Since the beginning of 1916 the British had been constantly receiving large reinforcements, and had therefore been able to extend their front considerably. They could now relieve an entire French army in the region of Arras, without sensibly lessening their resources, as new battalions and divisions continued to pour in from England, while on their side the French (contrary to German hope and expectation) had by no means used up all their reserves at Verdun.

The objects of the Allies in the impending battle were threefold:

- I. To disengage Verdun.
- II. To pin the enemy to the western front, and prevent him from moving his troops to and fro, from one side to the other, on his "interior" railway lines.
- III. To wear down and use up the German army as much as possible.



# THE SOMME



Battle of the Somme (1916)

As I have said before, the French line made almost a right angle; it went first from Nieupoort to Compiègne, or north to south, and then struck off from east to

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west. The Champagne offensive had been made on the eastern side of this angle; this time the sector chosen by the Allies was on the west. The attack was to be made on a front some forty kilometres long, running from Gommécourt, which is on a line with Doullens, to a point north of Chaulnes.

The offensive of 1915 had been made in a mining district, but this region was widely different, being purely agricultural, devoid of the large villages and groups of houses which the Germans know so well how to turn into solid centres of resistance. Wide fields of grain and beets stretch on every side, with occasional villages nestling among their orchards wherever good water may be found, looking like great bunches of verdure stuck into the cultivated ground. Peaceful little streams creep with even current through the valleys which they have gradually worn in the plateau, bringing down the water thrown off by the clay and chalk soil of the higher land; there it is dry and almost arid, but the lowlands are soaking with moisture, with peat bogs and little semi-aquatic gardens surrounded by water, which the market-gardeners have to reach by boats, although there are many canals and two rivers, the Ancre and the Somme.

The fall of the land is very slight; on the banks of the Ancre only fifty-four metres in ten kilometres.<sup>1</sup>

It is even flatter on the plateau of Santerre, south of the Somme, where our front had been since directly after the battle of the Marne, at the time when each

<sup>1</sup> A metre is about thirty-nine inches; a kilometre is five-eighths of a mile.

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adversary had tried to outflank the other's left wing.

The left wing of the Sixth German Army had been formed south of Arras in April, and was composed of the One Hundred and Eleventh Division, the First Division of Bavarian reserves, and the Thirty-eighth landwehr. The Second German Army was also formed in April, toward Mouchy-au-Bois, and consisted of the Fifty-second Division, the Tenth Bavarian Division, the Sixth Corps, and the Fourteenth Reserve Corps, while at the same time there were a certain number of German divisions resting between their Fourth and Sixth Armies; the One Hundred and Twenty-third, south of Bruges, the Fifty-third and One Hundred and Twenty-seventh on the Lys, and the Fifty-fourth where the Lys and the Scheldt come together, at Ghent. Farther southeast of Cambrai another group was formed by the Twenty-second Corps and two divisions of the Guards.

That was more or less the disposition of the enemy's forces. On our side, twenty-five kilometres, on a front forty kilometres long, were to be held by the British, the remaining fifteen, to the southward, by the French. The British lines went as far as the Somme, but a short time before the offensive began some of their forces bent toward the north, and the French took over a sector about five kilometres long on the right side of the Somme, running from Carnoy to the river.

In view of the time and place which had been decided upon for this offensive, of the number of forces

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to be engaged, and the probably important result, it is interesting to see how the Franco-British staffs prepared for it.

Since both armies had dug themselves into trenches all the staffs had been studying the problem of a frontal attack, in order to break the enemy's lines. No such difficulty had ever presented itself in any previous warfare. Great use of trenches had been made in the Russo-Japanese War, but they were not continuous; open spaces still gave an opportunity for manœuvring, and it was on account of one of these spaces that the Japanese army, using troops made available by the taking of Port Arthur, could flank the right wing of the Russian army and win the battle of Mukden; now the trenches stretched without a break from the sea to the neutral countries, rendering it impossible for one adversary to outflank or envelop the other.

Two solutions suggest themselves, the first being to rush the enemy's lines with successive waves, one after the other, until all his positions have been carried and a clear space behind them reached on which there is a chance to manœuvre, and even use cavalry. This seems easy theoretically, but it has great drawbacks. No matter how fine the material of the assaulting waves may be, they cannot always fight with the same intensity. The first line of trenches and the second may be carried with a rush, but if the third is reached at all the assaulting columns have inevitably become more or less intermingled, and their connection with the

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rear is almost always broken. When this happens it is exceedingly difficult to guide troops; the least obstruction or a few machine-guns will stop them. More than that, the artillery cannot give the columns sufficient support. If the men have advanced rapidly for three, four, or five kilometres the guns must be brought up, but they cannot be sighted quickly enough to be counted on, and they may fail just when there is most need of them, to the great discouragement and danger of the attacking force.

The other solution is widely different. The advance is slow and methodical. Assaulting columns are not only told where they are to go, but how far, and when they reach that point they halt and consolidate the positions they have just taken. If necessary, the artillery advances and deliberately proceeds to open another bombardment; when that has had its effect the infantry goes forward again, carries the second line, and so on. There is no sudden rush, with its consequent gap—steady and even pressure is brought to bear until the enemy is gradually forced back.

At the beginning of the battle of Verdun the Germans followed the first method, but after the 25th, when they were checked on the plateau of Douaumont, they had recourse to the second, and it was this second method, perfected and carried out along a wider front, that was used by the French and British troops in the Somme offensive.

The principal defect of this mode of attack is that it removes the possibility of surprise, which has often

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been a decisive factor in a battle. Toward the end of the war, especially after the invention of tanks permitted new tactics, the General Staffs frequently returned to the first method, and carried whole lines by a sudden onrush. The credit for discovering and first using tanks belongs entirely to the British; these engines were of incalculable use in levelling barbed wire and smashing nests of machine-guns, thus clearing the way in some degree for the infantry. The Germans, who lacked tanks, supplied their places with light guns which followed and supported their infantry in its advance.

As the war went on, preparation for a great offensive became at the same time more extensive and more minute, necessitating many weeks of hard work, and complex industrial organization. The adversary's system of defense must be studied, suitable places must be found for the artillery, roads chosen for the troops to follow, connections and supplies of food and munitions assured, and even the unexpected foreseen, in order to reduce the element of chance to a minimum.

Each new offensive was an improvement on those which had preceded it. Before that of the Somme, the rear of the armies about to take part in it was for months a gigantic open-air workshop in which all sorts of tasks were undertaken; bad roads were mended and new ones made; broad and narrow gauge railways were laid; quarries were opened and worked to supply sufficient stone.



*From a photograph from "L'Illustration."*

At the headquarters of Foch at Sarcus.  
Foch, Clémenceau, General Weygand (behind).





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It was of course essential that the enemy should not see what was going on; he had to be blindfolded. Now the eyes of an army are its airplanes and its captive balloons, and thanks to the audacity and coolness of the British and French aviators it was absolutely impossible for a German plane to fly over our lines. As for their balloons, fifteen were brought down within five days, and after that those that dared to rise only did so with the utmost discretion, and descended promptly at the first sight of an English or French airman.

The preliminary bombardment began on June 25th, and was carried on for seven days instead of the five which had been planned, as bad weather interfered with the attack. The British firing on the whole length of the German front was of unprecedented violence, and the French artillery was affectually reinforced by some of our very heavy guns which were brought up by rail.

During these days the Allied aviators watched the bombardment incessantly, making frequent reports by telephone, and taking many photographs; by this means the British and French staffs could follow the firing hour by hour, and know exactly how much damage it was doing to the German trenches and shelters.

### THE FIRST STAGE OF THE BATTLE

In order to follow the course of the great battle it is indispensable to look at the operations on each of the sectors separately.

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### *French Sector—The Fighting North of the Somme*

The village of Vaux, which was wrecked by the German artillery, is on the right bank of the Somme, and from it part of the battle-field may be seen as a long uneven ridge running to the horizon, looking somewhat like the waves of a choppy sea.

At half past seven in the morning of the 1st of July the infantry started for the German trenches.

For two years the Germans had been constantly strengthening their positions; two, three, or four lines of trenches were connected by deep "boyaux," every patch of wood was taken advantage of, and the village of Curlu heavily fortified. But the dash of our men was irresistible, and the first German positions were taken with a rush. Some of our young soldiers of the class of 1916 were under fire for the first time, and as they climbed the chalk cliff called the "Chapeau de Gendarme," they waved their handkerchiefs and cried: "Vive la France!"

Curlu was held by three companies of Bavarians, who put up a very stiff fight. Machine-guns which had not been destroyed by the bombardment appeared on the roofs, in the windows of houses, around the church, and even in the air-holes of cellars.

The assaulting columns, in obedience to orders, came to a sudden halt and threw themselves on their faces. All our batteries then concentrated their fire on the village, and in half an hour not a house was standing and the machine-guns were silenced. Then the

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attack went on, and this time our men took Curlu with almost no losses. During the night the Germans counter-attacked, which was only what was expected, and they failed completely, so we kept what was left of the village, and the next three days were spent in strengthening the positions we had taken.

On the 5th of July, at seven o'clock in the morning, another leap forward was made by more infantry of the same corps. The village of Hem, which lay more to the east, and all the trenches in the neighborhood were taken in a few hours; our men got as far as the edge of the road to Péronne, and by noon the last Germans had been cleared out of some houses in the outskirts of Hem. At the same hour one of our companies had taken the quarry called "Spahn," southeast of the village, and was quietly lunching there.

So well had all arrangements been made, and so swift had been the assaults, that our losses were very slight.

### *South of the Somme*

Two hours later on that morning of July 1st, at half past nine o'clock, the attack was launched south of the river on a front of about ten kilometres from the village of Frise, stopping opposite that of Estrées. The assaulting troops were taken from a colonial corps that had distinguished itself in the course of the war, and further to the south were some Breton reserves. Both groups were beyond praise, and, like their comrades in the northern sector, they accomplished what they had to do in a few hours.

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That evening all the first German positions had been carried, from the outskirts of Frise to the edge of Estrées, and we held the villages of Dompierre, Becquincourt, and Fay.

The next morning our infantry poured into the village of Frise, and had taken it by noon, finding a battery of 77 guns in excellent condition. Then on they went to the northeast corner of Méréaucourt wood; the village of Herbécourt, a little more to the south, was completely surrounded, and in our hands an hour later. That evening we held all the enemy's defenses connecting Herbécourt with Assevillers. The same steady advance continued on the 3d. Assevillers and Flaucourt fell, and on the morning of the 4th cavalry patrols penetrated as far as the village of Bar-leux; it was strongly held, but a regiment of the Foreign Legion carried it later in the day, and farther to the south the French took Estrées.

Counter-attacks made by the enemy on the 5th were again a complete failure, and on the 9th our advance continued and the village of Biaches fell. On the 10th we reached La Maisonnette, on the highest ground in that region, overlooking the town of Péronne and the Somme valley.

Farther to the south our men were billeted for the time being in the neighborhood of Estrées. The troops who held this point and kept it connected with the rest of the French lines had an exceedingly difficult manœuvre to carry out, which called for the utmost coolness and self-control. They were obliged to leave

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their trenches and advance eastward; then, having gone a certain distance, they were to wheel suddenly, change their front, and face to the south in order to guard against any possible flank attack which the Germans might attempt later.

In the course of ten days the French had succeeded in advancing ten kilometres in certain places on a line fifteen kilometres in length. They had carried about eighty square kilometres of all sorts of defenses—trenches, fortified villages, quarries turned into forts, etc.; they had captured 85 guns, many of heavy calibre, 100 machine-guns, 26 “minenwerfer,” and a large quantity of materials; they had also taken prisoners amounting to 235 officers and 12,000 men. The German losses were very heavy; around Biaches, for instance, a whole regiment was wiped out.

We had certainly reason to be proud of this result, and others of the same sort were to follow. The sustained regularity of the advance merits particular attention. If its strategical mechanism be examined, it will be seen that the left of the French line turned on a pivot placed on its right, at Estrées. As the fighting went on, this wheeling movement became more apparent; on the 3d the extreme left advanced from Méricourt to Buscourt, the left from Herbécourt to Flaucourt, which was taken, while Assevillers was carried by the centre. On the 4th it was the turn of the right to leave its fixed point, to advance and to take the two villages of Estrées and Belloy. From the 1st to the 5th the corps operating south of the Somme

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went steadily forward from the left, and after a few days' rest the attack began again on the 9th, and again from the left, before Péronne, Biaches, and La Maisonnette.

The French had thus reached the suburbs of Péronne, an old city used to warfare, because it occupies an important strategic position at the top of the great curve made by the Somme between Bray and Ham. Any army coming from north to south and wishing to cross the Somme would, both naturally and necessarily, pass through the town.

### *The British Attack*

The British attacking front ran from Gommécourt as far as Herbécourt, being cut in two by the valley of the Ancre. Troops advanced at half past seven in the morning of July 1st, and took some ground north of the Ancre, part of which they lost later, but south of it, as far as the spot where they connected with the French troops, they made gratifying progress, during which they were excellently supported.

Continuity of sustained effort is what especially characterized the Franco-British advance. The Allies did not flatter themselves that it would be rapid, but slow and sure; they had kindled a great fire, and did not mean to let it die out. The movement must not be looked at by itself, but as a component part of a well-considered plan, connected with the battle of Verdun, with the Russian offensive, and also with the counter-offensive made by Italy.

Before speaking further of the brilliant attack of

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the British troops I should like to point out in what its conditions differed from those of the French advance. All the evidence tends to show that the Germans expected the British to move against them; they had massed a large number of troops, and were fully prepared. It seems, on the contrary, that when the French pounced upon them they were taken by surprise and considerably disconcerted; having announced *urbi et orbi* that all the French reserves, to the last division, had been used up at Verdun, they had ended by believing their own assertions.

In the beginning, therefore, the British met with more opposition than the French, but this only stimulated them to display greater courage and determination; their newly raised forces fought with the utmost gallantry. In the three first days their gains were important; they carried part of the German first line, took several heavily fortified villages by storm, although they were vigorously defended, and captured 4,300 prisoners, continuing to add to this number. These first engagements were valuable, besides the material advantage, in giving the troops absolute self-confidence; the new levies proved that they could not only stand up to the Kaiser's best troops but beat them.

During the night of the 6th and 7th the British re-attacked powerfully, and were again brilliantly successful, and in that of the 10th and 11th they took Contalmaison by storm after a violent bombardment; a German counter-attack was repulsed, and they remained masters of the whole village.

This last exploit was the end of what may be called

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the first stage of the battle. In his communiqué of the 11th the commander-in-chief of the British forces, General Sir Douglas Haig, summed up the glorious doings of these days as follows:

"After ten days and nights of continuous fighting, our troops have completed the methodical capture of the whole of the enemy's first system of defense on a front of 14,000 yards.

"This system of defense consisted of numerous and continuous lines of fire trenches, support trenches, and reserve trenches, extending to various depths of from 2,000 to 4,000 yards, and included five strongly fortified villages, numerous heavily wired and intrenched woods, and a large number of immensely strong redoubts.

"The capture of each of these trenches represented an operation of some importance, and the whole of them are now in our hands."

The prisoners taken by the British amounted to 7,500.

The French on their part, not to be outdone, closed the first stage by new successes which added still further to their important takings. South of the Somme, where the river curves, they marched on Péronne, and on the 10th took a small fort which the Germans defended obstinately, causing us considerable losses; the village of Biaches was carried on the 9th.

Above Biaches the river winds about a rounded eminence known as "côte 97"<sup>1</sup> which overlooks the

<sup>1</sup> The number denotes its height in metres.



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confluence of the Somme with the Cologne. This eminence had two positions of some importance; La Maissonnette was one and the other was a clump of trees; both were carried by our men on the 10th. The trees were on the fortified crest of the ridge running along the plateau, looking down on the Somme side to where Péronne lies in the valley, less than a kilometre away.

The total number of prisoners taken by the French was over 11,000.

If one looks out on the map the positions taken by the Allies the first impression is as if a very stout man were seen in profile; in the sector south of the Somme the French at certain points advanced as much as ten kilometres. In that sector the first and second German lines were all in our hands; to the north and south our advance had been slower. This unevenness in the extent of ground taken is one of the characteristics of trench warfare, and is caused by the superior strength of some positions over others, or the greater obstinacy of resistance.

On the whole the results of this first stage of the battle were most satisfactory. The Allied armies had gone steadily forward, and had accomplished their objects everywhere, whereas the German counter-attacks had failed, and they had been obliged to call up all their reserves.

It was evident that the concerted plan was so far successful; it was now to be carried further.

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### THE SECOND STAGE

The map shows that the salient made by the ground which we had taken from the Germans brought our troops within a kilometre of Péronne, but it was hard for them to advance farther in that direction until their lines, or those of the British, were somewhat straightened, both on the north and to the south. To correct these lines was the chief object of the battle's second stage.

The British lost no time in getting ready, and barely two days passed after they had taken Contalmaison and Mametz wood before they threw themselves upon the enemy's second lines along a front of five hundred yards. That was at half past three o'clock in the morning of July 14th, the French national holiday. That day Paris saw a touching ceremony.

The President of the Republic, members of the government, and the military authorities were present at an imposing review of troops brought expressly from the front, including contingents from those of our allies. Meanwhile the British army on the Somme was celebrating the day after its own fashion.

The German first lines were attacked on two sides simultaneously; from west to east as far as Fricourt, and from north to south toward Contalmaison. This time the attack was only made from north to south, going exactly from la Boisselle to the wood of Trônes, which the British had taken, but where some Germans were still holding out.

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The time set for the attack, half past three in the morning, was about half an hour before daylight—a favorite time for German excursions of a like character. By beginning their assault while it was still dark the British had a chance of escaping from a barrage fire and from such machine-guns as had not been already destroyed. The choice of this time shows that the British generals had absolute confidence in their troops, as all military men know that a night attack gauges accurately not only the men's courage, but their discipline, their cohesion, and their self-possession. If soldiers are not well trained, sure of themselves, and entirely under control by their officers they may fall into confusion, or even be seized with panic.

This day of the 14th was brilliantly successful for the British, as their plans worked admirably at every point. The entire second German line was carried at one rush; they also took three villages, Longueval, Bazentin-le-Grand, and Bazentin-le-Petit, with both woods of Bazentin into the bargain, besides chasing the remaining Germans out of the wood of Trônes. Beyond Longueval the wood of Delville stretches for some distance; the British got hold of it all excepting a narrow strip at the north end. Furthermore, their advanced detachments pushed ahead to the wood of Foureaux, and the troops stopped there for some time until the staff, thinking the position somewhat too much exposed, called them back.

To the north of the sector they entered the suburbs

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of Pozières, a village on the highway from Albert to Bapaume, and on the 17th they took fifteen hundred yards more of the German positions northeast of Bazentin-le-Petit, at the same time widening the gap to the east of Longueval and capturing the farm of Waterlot, an important position which was stubbornly defended.

At Ovillers the village was fought over for ten days, from the 7th of July without stopping; the Prussian Guard disputed every inch, and it was not until the 17th that they were cleared out of the last houses, and the remnant of the defenders, 2 officers and 124 men, made prisoners.

### THE GERMAN COUNTER-ATTACK

It was not to be expected that the Germans would sit down tamely under such losses as they had suffered at the hands of the British; their morale had also received a severe shock, which was even more serious. For the first time since the war began the new British troops, "Kitchener's army," had pitted themselves against seasoned German soldiers, who were expecting to be attacked and were heavily reinforced—and had beaten them.

All the forces which could possibly be taken away from the French front were collected by the Germans in this sector, and on the 18th of July they made a desperate effort to recapture the lost ground. They began their counter-attack with at least thirteen battalions, after a violent bombardment with asphyxiat-

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ing and lachrymatory shells. The struggle was bitter all night long; the Germans failed at the Waterlot farm, but managed to take back part of the Delville wood, and to get a foothold in some houses at the northern end of Longueval. In their turn the British counter-attacked furiously the next day, getting hold again of much that they had lost at Longueval and in the Delville wood, and the day after that they were markedly successful, as they drove the enemy out of the Foureaux wood, which is the highest point of the region. On the 23d they again took the initiative, and attacked from the village of Pozières to Guillemont. There was a vigorous rhythm in the British fighting; they attacked persistently and defended obstinately. Throughout the battle of the Somme they took the initiative; the Germans only reacted to a limited extent; their counter-attacks were slow and did not lead to any satisfactory result, and the Allies kept all that they had won.

### THE FRENCH ATTACK

On the 15th and 17th of July the Germans made two counter-attacks on the lines taken by the French at Biaches and La Maisonnette; by the help of a fog they slipped into the valley and took Biaches by surprise, but we struck back quickly and chased them out again.

On the 20th of July we made a general attack to balance that made by the British on the 14th. It should be noticed that each of the Allies alternately

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dealt stunning blows on the German lines, thus helping their common advance.

North of the Somme, on a front of five kilometres from "côte 139" (eight hundred metres north of Herbécourt), the French carried the first German trenches, and got as far as the slope of the round hillock on which Herbécourt stood.

South of the Somme, where the situation had been unchanged since July 9th, all the first German position was carried for a distance of six kilometres, and south of Soyécourt we also took their first position as far up as Vermandovillers. In the course of these different actions, north and south of the Somme, we took 2,900 prisoners, of whom 30 were officers.

This first month of the Franco-British offensive was marked on both sides by progressive advances toward objects strictly determined beforehand, and was made in a series of leaps forward, connected one with another and all leading to a concerted result.

The better to overcome all the obstacles accumulated by the enemy the Allies advanced by regular stages, taking plenty of time, and providing for every possible event; each success was followed by a pause, to allow for further preparation before the next attack. That is what I have called the rhythm of the offensive.

It is interesting to compare this offensive with that of the Germans at Verdun, as the difference is so great that it almost amounts to a contrast.

At Verdun the Germans made their total gains in the first four days of the battle. Beginning in the morn-

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ing of February 21st, they advanced with scarcely any interruption during the 22d, 23d, and 24th. On the 25th they reached their farthest point, and that afternoon, on the plateau of Douaumont, the result of the battle was decided, when the French brought up their reserves and stopped the enemy short. For more than five months afterward the German progress was altogether insignificant; if their lines in August are compared with those of the end of February, the difference is scarcely noticeable, and it is the same thing on the left bank of the Meuse.

On the Somme the French and the British went forward step by step—but they were not stopped.

The expenditure of munitions, however, had been so great that it was indispensable to replenish the stock, and the month of August was only marked by the taking of Maurepas. Early in September fighting began again; General Foch undertook a new series of operations in the direction of Bapaume, Péronne, and Nesles, and, as before, these operations were closely connected; Foch and the officers of the British staff got on together admirably, and from that time he excelled in the combined offensives which obliged the Germans to scatter their forces. On the 3d of September, south of the Somme, our armies under Fayolle and Micheler took Berny, Vermandovillers, and Chilly; and 3,000 prisoners to boot; on the 6th they went beyond Belloy and Chaulnes, and got possession of Bouchavesnes on the 12th.

Then again it was the turn of the British, and the

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15th is an important day in the chronicle of the war, for it was then that tanks were used for the first time; after that they played an increasingly important part up to the end of the war. The German morale was much shaken by this new and terrifying engine; they fell back all along the line between Bouchavesnes and Thiepval. During October and November the conflict went on, and the valuable positions of Ablaincourt, Pressoire, and Sallisel were added to the Allies' score.



## CHAPTER XI

### A VISIT TO FOCH

It was during this month of October, 1916, when the battle of the Somme was nearing its end, that (as I have said in the first chapter) I paid a visit to General Foch in his headquarters at Villers-Bretonneux, east of Amiens. He was evidently much pleased at the results of the advance, as indeed he had reason to be, for everything was turning out as the Franco-British staffs had planned.

The armies of the Kronprinz before Verdun were quiescent. Four months earlier, in June, the fortress was menaced by twenty-two divisions and under the fire of more than six hundred batteries. Five reserve divisions were in the region of Vouziers-Saint-Avold, and seven more resting between the sea and St. Quentin, ready to be sent to any point of the front.

When the Allied offensive began on the 1st of July the German staff and all the Teutonic press cried from the housetops that "not a man, not a gun, shall be withdrawn from before Verdun; its fall is only a question of days, and the attack must go on until it is taken."

All the same, on the second day of the Allied offensive, five German reserve divisions and thirteen detached battalions between Chaulnes and Rheims were

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summoned in hot haste to stem the Franco-British advance, on the third the reserve divisions in the north were called, and before long those in the east which were intended to replenish the besieging force.

By the 9th of July eleven out of the twelve divisions available at the end of June were already engaged on the Somme; the twelfth was also soon drawn in, and from that time the enemy was obliged to withdraw units from the other sectors on the front, until all his reserves were in action.

Early in July the Kronprinz found his artillery dwindling; about a hundred of his batteries were taken from him, and although he still kept most of his infantry, the reserve divisions on which he counted had been absorbed. Day by day, almost hour by hour, his best units were withdrawn, making it impossible to fill up the gaps which another attack must make in his forces. Only a few kilometres now lay between him and Verdun, which he was pledged to take, so he tried to find a way out of the difficulty by narrowing his attacking front and concentrating the troops still at his disposal. This allowed him to make an assault in the direction of Souville, even more desperate than those which had preceded it.

It was the last stroke at Verdun—the final charge of the mortally wounded wild boar. I went over the battle-ground a few days later; the enemy had never been so near the citadel, yet I found General Nivelle (who had succeeded General Pétain in command), the corps, and divisional staffs, and the fighting units all

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full of hope and confident that the worst was over. Every one was convinced that the Kronprinz's army was at its last gasp. But, even admitting that the defenders were too sanguine, and that the Germans might succeed in covering the few kilometres between them and the Meuse, in reaching the old ramparts of the citadel on its left bank and even in getting possession of the accumulation of ruins which had once been houses, they would still be stopped before getting much farther. The battle of Verdun was, above all, the triumph of will.

The hopeful spirits were right; deprived of part of his artillery and all of his reserves, the Kronprinz had not sufficient material for any further aggression. His forces were yet more depleted in the middle of August, when the high command took away a portion of his infantry and some of his aviators; by October, instead of having, as formerly, always more than twenty-two divisions under him he was reduced to eighteen and a half.

The French staff kept track of these successive reductions with the utmost care, and, knowing the enfeeblement of the Kronprinz's forces, judged that the time had come for a local attack on our part. This was a brilliant success; Nivelle's troops made a magnificent assault on the fort of Douaumont, taking it in a few hours, with several thousand prisoners. It was a body blow for the Kronprinz, and he showed his exhaustion by not attempting to return it.

In the autumn of 1916 there were marked evidences

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of wear and tear in the German armies, as they had been called upon to resist our thrust on the Somme after the long-drawn-out struggle before Verdun.

In the course of my visit to Foch his chief of staff, General Weygand, gave me some interesting and striking details as to this: the German army might be compared to a long rope which was gradually paid out during the battle of the Somme, as one division after another was decimated, until the end of the coil had almost been reached.

Between the 1st of July and the 17th of September thirty-four divisions were engaged against the British, and thirty-three divisions plus seventeen battalions on the French front, and from September 1st to November 1st they brought up no less than fifty-two new divisions from quiet sectors. The greater part of the German army on the western front thus passed through the battle of the Somme, coming out sensibly weakened, both materially and morally, and with the consciousness that it was faced by foes to whom, sooner or later, it must yield.

Joffre, Foch, and the British High Command had therefore every reason to congratulate themselves on their combined offensive.

Our staff had accurate and detailed information regarding the crisis which had been reached by the Germans up to a certain point, but in reality the situation was much graver than we then knew. Bled white by their losses at Verdun and on the Somme, and obliged moreover to send troops to the Orient for the campaign

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against Rumania, they had come to the end of their resources in man power. They faced the facts with virile energy, calling out classes of young recruits, and drumming up every man who could be useful; by these expedients they managed to fill up their divisions after a fashion, but they had nothing left to fall back upon; the Allies had only to continue their efforts; victory was within their reach.

No doubt bad weather, and the approach of winter, made it difficult to follow up the operations on the Somme, but it was clear that it must be done as soon as circumstances would permit; above all, the same leaders and the same methods must be adhered to, for both leaders and methods had been tried and had come through a severe test with flying colors.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE CHANGE OF COMMAND

PROOFS of the German army's weakness were not far to seek. On the 5th of September, when the battle of the Somme was still raging, the chief of the General Staff, General von Falkenhayn, lost favor and was replaced by Marshal von Hindenburg. This was supposedly because Falkenhayn was held responsible for the failure of the Verdun offensive, which he had advised and carried out contrary to the advice of Hindenburg, who did not think an advance on the western front likely to succeed, and recommended that the Russian campaign should be vigorously pursued in order to get one adversary permanently out of the way.

Now the fact that the Germans had been stopped before Verdun was the direct cause of their lamentable failure on the Somme, a failure acknowledged to the world by the removal of the head of their armies in the midst of a battle.

(The same thing had happened two years before, when von Moltke was removed because he was held responsible for their defeat at the Marne.)

Yet another and still more striking proof of their terror—the word is not too strong—at the Franco-British advance is given by a decision of von Hinden-

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burg's, made as soon as he took command, which was humiliating in the extreme to Germany's pride and a serious blow to her prestige.

He resolved to withdraw his troops, during the winter, from a wide stretch of French territory, reaching from Arras to La Fère, and including, among others, the cities of Bapaume, Péronne, and Noyon. This sounded the knell of the German hopes, because instead of drawing nearer to Paris they were deliberately taking themselves farther away.

We may be sure that the German staff came to this conclusion much against its will, and only because holding on to the existing lines, including the salient of Noyon, which could be attacked on three sides, meant certain disaster in the following spring.

Therefore the situation was excellent for us from a military point of view, and I repeat that the Allies had only to go on and finish a half-done job.

Unfortunately just at that time there was regrettable weakness in the political conduct of the war. M. Briand, harassed by the incessant attacks of his political opponents, and obliged to remodel his cabinet, consented to make a change in the chief leadership of the army. This was a mistake, as well as an injustice. A commander-in-chief is only to be removed if he loses a battle; the Germans did that, as we have seen, on two occasions, but we had just had two impressive successes—at Verdun and the Somme. It did not seem a fitting moment to part with our

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generalissimo, Joffre, the winner of the battle of the Marne, who was celebrated throughout the world, as his enthusiastic welcome showed when he went to America in the following year.

The reason given for superseding him was that younger men were needed, but nothing would have been easier, in case he was thought to be overtaxed, than to have given him an understudy in the person of a younger general who should be the chief of staff of a group of armies. But the firm name, so to speak, should have been kept; when a state or a business house is on the full tide of prosperity it is a mistake to change the title by which it is known and honored.

Foch was aimed at, as well as Joffre, and perhaps even more. One of the foremost of our politicians said to me: "He is too much of a mystic," but when I asked him what he meant by that he could find no words to answer me. It was insinuated here and there that Foch was worn out and ill, that it was absolutely necessary to replace him. As a matter of fact, five minutes talk with him was enough to convince any reasonable being that the stories about his fatigue and his illness were either ridiculous inventions or, what was worse still, downright slander.

When Foch reached the age limit on the 30th of September, 1916, he was kept on the active list and given the *Medaille Militaire*, but later in the year he came within an ace of being forced to retire. Happily good sense prevailed; toward the end of his command General Joffre had established at Senlis a board for the



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investigation of interallied military questions, and had put Foch at its head.

General Joffre was succeeded as commander-in-chief by General Nivelle. No one admires more than I do the magnificent military qualities of this leader, to whose energy France owes Verdun; General Nivelle is a fine soldier and a good disciplinarian, but, matters being as they were, it would have been infinitely better policy to have kept hands off the generalissimo.

This change had the result, among others, of modifying the plans for a Franco-British offensive early in 1917. The sector of attack, which was to have been on both sides of the angle formed by the German positions, the apex of which was near Noyon, was moved considerably farther east, between Soissons and Rheims. This modification naturally led to a certain amount of delay, which had troublesome consequences. If our offensive had been carried out as first decided upon, it would have coincided with the German retreat; the troops would have been able to advance on insufficiently defended positions, from which part of the artillery, especially the heavy guns, had been withdrawn. Such conditions would have made failure almost impossible.

General Foch did not stay long at Senlis. In the beginning of 1917 there were many signs that the Teutonic staff, desirous above all to gain some decisive advantage on the French front, might very likely try to strike at our vitals by violating Swiss neutrality, and General Foch was asked to draw up a plan of

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defensive operations in case this should happen. He went to Mirécourt, with his ever-faithful helper, General Weygand, and in a few weeks the plan was ready.

On the 17th of April, 1917, General Nivelle began his great offensive on the Chemin des Dames, as to which controversies have been exceedingly lively. It is still too soon to give a definite verdict regarding it from a military point of view, but it is only fair to say that the court of inquiry before which General Nivelle appeared some months later decided point-blank in his favor. In the first days our losses were no doubt heavy, but far below the extravagant number given to the public in a fit of scandalous nervousness; besides, an offensive is always costly. The results of this one, although not so great as people had been imprudently led to believe they would be, were on the whole very satisfactory; the movement was just reaching its full development when it was halted for political reasons.

A crisis followed, involving the army, on which it is too painful to dwell.

General Pétain replaced General Nivelle as commander-in-chief, and on May 15th, 1917, General Foch succeeded General Pétain as chief of staff. No post could have suited him better. Installed at Paris in the Hôtel des Invalides, he became the technical adviser of the government, and never had a broad and sane direction of the war, from a political as well as from a military point of view, been more necessary than at that moment. Never had it been more indis-

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pensable to grasp the situation on all the fronts, not only the French and British, but the Italian, Russian, Balkan, and even the Asiatic.

In July the military power of Russia, which had been a mere shell since the Revolution set in, crumbled hopelessly. Galvanized into activity by the passionate rhetoric of Kerensky, the Russian troops in Galicia made a show of advancing, but a couple of days later they retreated helter-skelter. Whole regiments and divisions refused to advance; deserters choked the roads, looted the villages, and put their officers to death. After that there was no more Russian army, and, consequently, no Russian front.

That made an integral change in the respective situations of the belligerents and in the problems which the Allied Staffs had to consider. About a hundred Austro-German divisions which had been holding the eastern front would now be for the most part free, and the German High Command would certainly use this unexpected addition to its available forces against the Allies. The storm was gathering; it was essential that we should know where it would burst.

Just then, and most opportunely, America declared war against Germany, bringing into the struggle all her enormous resources, financial, economic, and military. But months must pass before her help could be effective in the field, and in the meantime we had to stand firm against the German thrust. That was the harassing problem before Foch and his colleagues.

The first blow was dealt at Italy, as the Central

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Powers strove to overcome the front which seemed likely to offer least resistance. Their military offensive was preceded by a political one, carried on with their usual skill and unscrupulousness. Behind the lines as well as at the front a perfidious propaganda had weakened the national power of resistance, and on the 25th of October the Italian army met with disaster on the Isonzo. During the following days the German communiqués triumphantly announced the taking of a hundred thousand prisoners and more than seven hundred guns. The Allies could not allow this breakdown to go any further; Italy must be saved at any cost.

Foch immediately offered to assist General Cadorna with troops. His staff was fortunately familiar with all the details of transportation; four divisions were chosen with the utmost speed, from among the best and sturdiest in our army, and on the 26th they started on their journey, at the rate of forty trainloads a day, the first detachments arriving on November 1st. (The command of this army was given to General Duchêne.)

The Italian staff, fearing that a German offensive coming from the Alps would cut off their armies in the east, seemed disposed to fall back as far as the Mincio. Foch hastened to Italy, and met General Cadorna and the Italian leaders, inspiring them with his confidence, and pointing out the grave danger of any further retreat. The richest provinces of Italy, and her most celebrated cities would fall into the enemy's hands.

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In short, he played the same part toward the Italians that he had done so wisely three years before toward the British and the Belgians at the time of the battle of the Yser. It must be said that the Italian army had already begun to recover itself. A carefully studied plan of operations was decided upon, with Foch's advice and assistance, and as a result the Austro-German advance was definitely stopped on the Piave and on the plateau of Asiago.

An Interallied War Council had recently been established at Versailles, to be presided over by Foch as the representative of France. This was the first attempt at collaboration in view of the great battle which was evidently impending, and which in all probability would decide the war. The Germans were stripping their eastern front more and more, leaving only their inferior divisions, made up of men past the prime of life. All the rest, as well as the larger part of their formidable stock of artillery, was moved to our front. Everything pointed to a violent offensive on their part, in which all their remaining strength would be exerted to its utmost.

Until the American reinforcements should arrive, the Allies had but one means of resistance, and that was to pool their resources and share their reserves. In order to do this most effectively it was almost imperative to have a *sole commander*, who should have free disposal of the reserves, and be able to send this or that division, French or British, to this or that

point of the front without entering into long discussions as to whether it should or should not be done. The suggestion of this sole command, however, met with lively opposition, especially in England, where it seemed to be considered as merely a question of "home politics," and the British army had to suffer defeat almost amounting to calamity before England's consent to this indispensable measure could be obtained.

On the 21st of March, at nine o'clock in the morning, three German armies, forty-two divisions in all, made up of their finest shock troops, hurled themselves upon seventeen British divisions holding a front about eighty kilometres long, between La Fère and Fontainelles-Croisilles.

The next day the whole length of this front had been broken, and the Third and Fifth British Armies were in full retreat. On the 30th of March their line was Arras-Albert-Moreuil-Montdidier, as they had fallen back more than thirty kilometres in these few days. What was still more serious, the Fifth Army had retreated westward, instead of in a southeasterly direction, toward Paris. This made a wide gap between the right of the Fifth Army and the left of the Sixth French Army, which therefore, in spite of the most strenuous efforts, could not keep in contact with our ally.

One of the best German generals, von Hutier, who commanded this terrible offensive, threw all his reserves into this gap, and reached the line Montdidier-Noyon. The troops of General Humbert's army,

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summoned in hot haste and rushed to the field in motor-trucks, without their artillery, threw themselves into the unequal struggle with desperate bravery, and, with the aid of their dauntless officers, held back the German thrust.

On the 26th of March, at Doullens, General Foch was at last authorized to co-ordinate the forces of all the Allied armies, which made him actually generalissimo; a short time afterward he was given the title of "Generalissimo of the French, British, Belgian, and American forces on the western front."

## CHAPTER XIII

### FOCH, GENERALISSIMO

IN trench warfare on a large scale the lines may stretch for hundreds of kilometres without a gap; it is for the aggressor to break through this barrier and enlarge the space thus made. The problem is complex, and it is not astonishing that various solutions have been sought, for in no two instances is the situation the same.

I remember having long discussions on this absorbing subject with one of the greatest military men of our day, General Ratko Dimitriev, a Bulgarian by birth, but in the Russian service, and commander of a large army on the front at Riga. His career had been out of the ordinary and therefore interesting. He belonged to the party—none too numerous in his country—which believed that Bulgaria owed a debt of gratitude to Russia because that Power had freed her from the Ottoman yoke. While still very young he took part in the national movement which led to the expulsion of the reigning prince, Alexander of Battenberg, and left his country afterward to serve in the Russian army. When he went back later to Bulgaria his exceptional talents won for him the place of chief of the General Staff, and it was through his training that the Bulgarian armies became the best in any



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Balkan state. He prepared them, materially and in morale, for the conflict with Turkey which he knew was imminent, and when war broke out he took command of the most important army, on whose action the result of the struggle hung. He devised an admirable movement, comparable with the best of Napoleon's manœuvres, and brought about the brilliant victory of Kirk-Kilissé. This battle had many points of resemblance with that of Marengo, where General Bonaparte outmanœuvred the Austrians. The Turks were convinced that no important force would be able to make its way through the rocky passes of the Carpathians; Ratko Dimitriev, managing to keep his plan a profound secret, got his army across the mountains and fell upon the Turkish right wing, taking it completely by surprise and throwing it into a disorder that led to the success of Dimitriev's campaign.

His Russian sympathies were not calculated to win him favor in King Ferdinand's eyes, so when the Great War began he again offered his services to Russia. The Tsar first gave him command of a corps and later of an army, which he led with distinction during the advance into Galicia.

When I was sent on a mission to Russia in 1917 I went to Riga, and used to pass my evenings with the general, who was delighted to be able to discuss the war with a French officer.

"I have had some experience in military matters," he said, "and I have pondered over the question of breaking through a front, coming to the conclusion

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that staffs are mistaken in thinking that the only way to accomplish this is to accumulate guns and depend upon a long and intense bombardment. By dint of giving too much attention to material strength, the element of surprise is often overlooked, and yet surprise has always been, and must continue to be, of paramount importance in warfare. If you rain shells on one sector of an enemy's front for days at a time you are only giving him notice that you mean to attack him at that point. It is as if you should leave a card on him to announce your coming visit, and he must be an unusually stupid adversary if he does not get ready for you by massing his reserves in that sector, to put the brakes on your advance whenever that may come off. In my opinion you should go about it in another way. First, gather about fifteen good divisions at a convenient distance from where you mean to strike; then take the enemy by surprise and stun him by a savage blow. His line once broken, you push on boldly as fast as you possibly can."

Since then I have often thought of those prophetic words of Dimitriev's, for the course of military events soon proved him to be right. Early in 1917 a British army made a surprise attack in the Cambrai region which was an immense success, as the famous "Hindenburg line" was broken along a sector of some length. (Unluckily the British had not sufficient reserves to follow up their advantage.)

As the German staff was many divisions richer through the Russian defection, it sought a solution of

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this problem of a frontal attack by following the British example, and unconsciously the precepts of Dimitriev. An assault in force was to be made at a point on the front where it was not looked for, preceded by short but violent artillery firing, not so much meant to destroy the enemy's positions as to overcome his men by the use of gas shells.

General von Hutier, who possessed one of the clearest brains of the Teutonic staff, was ordered to try out this method on the Russian front at Riga; so he held a sort of dress rehearsal there, with the most gratifying results.

Early in March, 1918, the German divisions specially trained for this attack began to assemble within a radius of a hundred kilometres or so in the region around Cambrai. In order to keep the British in ignorance it was expressly forbidden to move troops in daytime, no fire was allowed in the cantonments at night, nor any intercourse between front and rear.

When this perfectly prepared attack came off, it had the effect of surprise on which the Germans had counted, and, as we have seen in the last chapter, the Fifth British Army had its front broken in, losing many prisoners and guns. Hope rose high when the Germans were able to pour through the gap made by the retreat of the British army; they hurried toward Noyon and Compiègne, jubilant as in the first days of the war, and the cry of "Nach Paris! Nach Paris!" rang out once more—it was surely the beginning of the final triumph.

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Although General Humbert's army managed to hold them, the situation was exceedingly critical; never, even in September, 1914, had they been so near Paris, where the shells from "Big Bertha," falling almost every day, seemed to announce to the veriest layman the extent and weight of the German advance. They drew very near Amiens, an all-important connecting link between the British and ourselves, and part of the main railway to Calais and Boulogne via Amiens, almost indispensable for the movements of our troops, was exposed to the enemy's guns.

Foch, as we have said, assumed the supreme command on the 26th of March, and two days later General Pershing sought him at the front and made him the following moving address in the name of the American Government: "I come to tell you that the American people will consider it a great honor to be allowed to fight in the present battle; I ask it in my name and theirs. I offer you our infantry, our artillery, our aviation; all that we have is yours, to do with as you think best; more are coming, and you shall have as many as you need. I have come expressly to tell you that the American people will be glad to have taken part in the greatest battle of history."

Shortly afterward the Italian Government also recognized the unity of command.

No leader had ever been at the head of such mighty armies, moving on so wide a field; Foch was faced by a formidable task, but he did not hesitate for a moment.

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First of all, the German push had to be stopped, and by the end of the month this had almost been done by slipping a new French army, the First, under General Debeney, between General Humbert's and the British. The Germans, out of breath, could go no farther. On the 5th of April General Foch received the French war correspondents; the interview was brief, for the generalissimo's time was precious, but in a few minutes he had given them the essential points.<sup>1</sup> "Well, gentlemen, affairs are not going badly with us. The Boche (since we must call him so) has not advanced since the 27th of March. Look at the map—the wave is dying on the beach. We have stopped him—now we must try and do better. I think I have no more to say to you—go on with your task—work with your pens, and we will work with our arms."

When Foch lectured at the Ecole de Guerre he used to advise his pupils to say to themselves whenever they had to solve an especially knotty problem: "What is the gist of it?" That brought them squarely face to face with the subject; they could recognize its chief difficulties, and decide coolly as to the best solution.

Foch now looked clear-sightedly at the problem with which he was confronted. He knew what must be the enemy's game. Thanks to the breaking-up of Russia, the German staff had now at its disposal in the west an army numerically larger than that of the Allies,

<sup>1</sup> Report of Lieutenant d'Entraygues, correspondent of the *Paris Temps*.

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composed in part of excellent shock troops, who could be trusted to open a gap in any front which they could take by surprise. The offensive of March 21st had been so encouraging that it would certainly be repeated, but the German reserves were now by no means inexhaustible. One, two, or even three more big advances might be attempted, but no more, and if one failed or was even half successful the game would be up. The American troops were now coming over with extraordinary speed—each month two or three hundred thousand men were landed on French soil, and at that rate the numerical superiority would soon be on the Allies' side. What mattered most for the moment was to stop the German drives, remaining on the defensive; to husband all reserves, and keep them in readiness to be moved quickly to whatever point of the front was threatened.

Looking at the situation as a whole and taking everything into consideration, Foch thought the chances of the Allies much better than those of the Germans, and he was able to impart his optimism and unwavering faith in our ultimate victory to all those with whom he came in contact, French and British alike.

This was particularly true in regard to Lloyd George, who is active, impulsive, and quick-witted. He was a great believer in Foch, and after an interview with him repeated the generalissimo's very words in the House of Commons: "Frankly, if I had to choose, I would rather be in my place than in that of the Germans."

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That absolute and indestructible faith was one of the sources of our victory, and one of Foch's greatest qualities was his ability to impart it to the heads of the Allied governments, from the moment of his taking the supreme command. It is said that in the garden of the town hall at Doullens, after the conference in which he was chosen, he drew a map of the front with his walking-stick on the ground, and said in his quiet voice to those around him, pointing to one spot: "I shall stop them there."

Instead of attempting to continue their advance on Amiens or Compiègne, the Germans began another offensive in April much farther to the north, on the British front between Armentières and La Bassée. This was also a surprise; Hindenburg's strategy consisted in making a sudden attack at some point where he was not expected, and in driving his adversary's lines in until his own forces had made a salient; when their advance became difficult, the salient was held, and another formed at a spot farther along the same line; after a time they would be close enough to touch each other, and all the enemy's line would have been gradually taken.

This second surprise was also very successful in the first days, part of the line near Neuve Chapelle, held by the Portuguese corps, being completely driven in. Two days later this corps was sent to the rear. In the valley of the Lys, between La Bassée and Ypres, the British lost all the lowlands; while the taking of Neuve Eglise and Mont Quesnel threatened their positions

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around Ypres. These were evacuated as a precautionary measure, and the British thus lost all the ground east of the city which they had won during the preceding autumn.

Sir Douglas Haig then issued a memorable order to his troops, telling them that they had their backs to the wall, and must die where they stood rather than fall back any farther. They did hold on with heroic stubbornness, and the timely arrival of strong French reinforcements helped to save the day.

On the 27th of May Ludendorff made another attack, this time on the Chemin des Dames; on the first day his divisions carried that strong position, and pushed on across the Aisne; and on those that followed he crossed the Vesle and got as far as the Marne, between Château-Thierry and Dormans.

This put us in grave peril, and we went through the most agonizing period of the whole war. The Germans were again close to Paris, nearer than they had been since the first battle of the Marne; our capital, shelled daily by their Gothas from the air and by Big Bertha from our own soil, was abandoned by half its population; collectors hurried to put their precious belongings in a safer place; politicians were much agitated and prodigal of criticism, professing themselves amazed that the enemy had been allowed to make a further advance.

Throughout these anxious days Foch stood firm as a rock, while Clémenceau showed his greatness and deserved the everlasting gratitude of his country by upholding the generalissimo steadfastly.



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That impartial witness, the map, shows how critical was our situation. The main railway from Paris to Nancy through Châlons had been cut, rendering it difficult to move our troops quickly, as they had to make roundabout journeys with infrequent connections on the secondary lines. Any further advance by the enemy meant imminent danger to Paris and a possible death-blow.

That was the dark side of the shield, but there was another point of view. Beginning on the 21st of March at St. Quentin, in Flanders during April, and in Champagne at the end of May, the Germans had won three incontestable victories, and had broken our line on a long sector. On the other hand, they had been unable to follow up any of these movements and force a decision; after a day's rush they slowed down and came to a standstill.

This was doubtless largely due to the heroism of the British and French armies, who flung themselves across the adversary's path and barred his way, but another cause may be found in the condition of the German army at that time.

In order to get adequate material for these vehement attacks Ludendorff had literally skimmed the cream off his troops, taking the best units here and there to form shock divisions capable of hurling themselves through any line. He attained his end, but there are drawbacks to such a course. After a violent assault, followed by two or three days' hard fighting, his men were completely used up and needed an interval of rest; they should have been followed up by

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fresh divisions to relieve them and carry on the advance. But these divisions were not forthcoming; those that were left, the skimmed milk so to speak, were of decidedly inferior quality. Figuratively speaking again, the Germans were capable of sowing the seed of victory but they lacked sturdy laborers to gather in the harvest.

This repeated selection and specialization ran the German army down by slow degrees until it was no longer sufficient for its tremendous task. The long intervals between their strokes showed this clearly.

For instance, six weeks passed between the offensive in Flanders and that on the Chemin des Dames; all that was time lost, when the Germans should have been pressing on and hitting hard. Their staff should have remembered the saying of von Jagow at the beginning of the war: "Speed is Germany's trump card."

Ludendorff's plan of successive salients, or "pockets," into the enemy's country, to be finally united into an unbroken line, can only succeed if the enemy is stunned by blows and not given time to recover himself; if he is able to make up his losses and consolidate his front the invader's work has all to be done over again; it is the old story of water poured through the sieve of the Danaïdes. The finest German divisions were thus worn away to no purpose.

After her defeat on the 21st of March, Great Britain again drew on her reserves; in two or three weeks all her losses in men and guns had been more than made up, and (what was still more serious for the Germans)

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the American troops were landing in ever-increasing numbers.

Ludendorff must have known all this, and if he went so slowly it was because he could do no better; long intervals were absolutely necessary to reorganize his shock troops.

Foch, who knew his adversaries inside and out, having studied the German army in books and watched it on the battle-field, was perfectly aware of what was going on; others might be alarmed, because they had less knowledge and less vision, but he only saw reasons for quiet confidence.

In June von Hutier tried a rush in the direction of Compiègne, which failed; General Mangin made a local counter-attack with a few divisions and pinned him to the spot. There were signs, however, that Ludendorff did not as yet mean to give up the game. He intended to gather close together, as a whip does his hounds, all the best troops that were still left and launch them in one spasmodic effort. He knew that it must be the last, for his forces were waning, while those of the Allies waxed daily; already a certain number of first-rate American divisions were eager to get into the fight.

The moment was drawing near when Foch, who hitherto had kept on the defensive, would decide that it was time to attack.

Again there was a long wait between the acts. The last weeks of June passed, and the first weeks of July, in apparent inaction, but by no means in idleness.

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Foch turned every minute of this precious time to account; he worked and kept others working. Those weeks were laborious for the Allied armies; they were getting ready to parry what each man knew was meant to be the final knock-out blow.

And on his part the generalissimo had to see that heavy reserves were ready to his hand when he should need to throw them into the battle at the decisive moment.

As the Germans had owed their last successes to surprise attacks, followed by suitable tactics, we had to be on our guard against a repetition of these movements, and here the clear-headed, observant, methodical talent of the commander-in-chief of the French army, General Pétain, was invaluable. Pétain has a positive genius for organization, pays great attention to details, and is especially good at finding solutions on the spur of the moment for the most difficult and unforeseen problems.

It was absolutely necessary for us to find out where the German troops were concentrating, in order to know when and where they were likely to attack. Our Intelligence Department and its helpers on the staffs redoubled their vigilant efforts, and before long got wind of the enemy's plan. Champagne seemed to be the district chosen, for there were signs of intense activity on that front; railways were in constant use, aviation fields were prepared, and munition depots multiplied. Then there was another sign, seldom to be seen but significant to experienced eyes, the firing

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of time-shells exploding high in air, a cautious method employed by the Germans to determine the fire of batteries recently brought up. The Franco-American troops were on the alert night and day.

Toward the end of June we were almost positive that the attack was to be on the Champagne front, and on July 6th the indications were still clearer. On the next day, the 7th, General Gouraud, commanding the Fourth French Army, addressed the following ringing order of the day to the Franco-American troops under him, to prepare them for the coming ordeal:

*"To the French and American soldiers of the Fourth Army:*

"We may be attacked at any moment. You all know that a defensive battle has never been waged under more favorable conditions. We were forewarned and are on our guard. We are heavily reinforced by both infantry and artillery.

"You will fight upon the ground which your untiring toil has made into a stronghold. This stronghold will be invincible if all the approaches are well guarded.

"The firing will be terrible, but you will bear it without flinching. The attack will be violent, in a cloud of smoke, dust, and gas, but your positions and your means of defense are strong.

"Your hearts are those of free and brave men.

"No one must look behind him, nor yield a foot of ground.

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"You must have but one thought—to kill until they have had enough.

"Your general believes that you will break their attack and be proud of this day.

"GOURAUD."

On the 10th of July our Intelligence Department reported the advance as due on the 14th or 15th, and some vigorous raids on the German lines were ordered to obtain definite details. During the night of the 14th a volunteer party of four French soldiers, led by a lieutenant, was most fortunate in one of these expeditions; they threw themselves boldly upon the enemy's trenches, and brought back prisoners from whom we found out all we wanted to know. Never did drag-net make a better haul! The enemy's artillery preparation was to begin at ten minutes past midnight, and at a quarter past four the infantry was to advance, protected by a rolling barrage.

The names of the five heroes to whose bravery and coolness we owe this valuable information should always be remembered; they were Lieutenant Balestier, Sergeant Lejeune, Corporals Hoquet and Gourmelon, and Private Aumasson. General Gouraud himself pinned the Cross of the Legion of Honor on Lieutenant Balestier's breast, and never had it been more gallantly won.

That same night, at eleven o'clock, the General gave the order to begin artillery firing, as a counter-preparation, and by half past eleven our batteries

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were in full blast with a barrage which anticipated the enemy's and interfered with his proposed attack. (This heavy firing was plainly heard on that night of the 14th in Paris and all the surrounding region.)

### THE DEFENSIVE BATTLE

In the great fight which was beginning, one of the decisive battles of the war, General Foch's strategy was as follows:

To stop the enemy short, and keep him from gaining any ground. That was the defensive battle. As soon as the waves of his assault had been broken, to counter-attack vigorously, with all available forces, taking advantage of the perilous position of the German armies in the enormous salient, or "pocket," which they had made for themselves between Soissons, Château-Thierry, and Rheims. Both these parts of the battle were closely connected, and were of equal importance, as the counter-attack could only succeed if the defense held like a wall of steel.

Now, General Pétain had evolved this ingenious idea for the defense; to thin out the troops in our first line, massing them farther back, so that when the Germans made their first rush they would not be solidly opposed, but would tire themselves before meeting the force awaiting them.

In a fencing bout, if your opponent's strength lies in delivering rapid and repeated thrusts, you may show your skill by giving ground and withdrawing your foil at the instant of his thrust; his foil, instead of

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touching your breast, meets only empty air—and you choose that second to get in your return thrust. But, whether in war or in fencing, that manœuvre can only be successful if it is well done; a deliberate defensive on a second line requires a peerless chief and troops of the very first order. The units left in the first line are almost inevitably sacrificed; their part is to allow themselves to be killed in their tracks after having retarded the enemy's advance by scattering his ranks, so that he may be fatigued and out of breath when he reaches the second line.

The soldiers of General Berthelot and General Gouraud accepted this sacrifice with stoical courage.

The Germans made their great attack from Château-Thierry to the Main de Massiges. Their objective may readily be seen on the map: they proposed to surround Rheims and the Montagne de Rheims, to overcome the defense of that city by a twofold envelopment, and afterward to push on to Epernay and Châlons. Their shock divisions hoped to reach these two towns on the first or second day. An advance on Châlons was a grave danger for the Allies, as it would imperil our communications between the armies of the east and those of the north.

To bear the brunt of this defensive movement, and in fact the greater part of the German attack, the French were beyond measure fortunate in having a magnificent leader, General Gouraud, of whom it may be said, as it was of one of Napoleon's generals: "To become brave one had but to look at him."

No commander in our armies has more influence



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over troops than he; his presence inspires them to devotion and sacrifice, because his own life has been one long sacrifice to his duty and his country. He had a brilliant colonial career, beginning shortly after he left St. Cyr, when, a young lieutenant of twenty-two, with only a handful of men, he captured the negro King Samori, who had rebelled against us, after a desperate chase. The outbreak of the Great War found him in Morocco, and on his return he was given a division on the Argonne front, where he got his first wound among his men in the firing-lines. He had an almost miraculous escape, as the ball which was intended to kill him passed between his arm and his side, letting him off with a severe wound. Although suffering greatly he flatly refused to give up his command, and as I was in the next sector and had been honored with his friendship for fifteen years, I went to see him soon afterward. I found him in a house in one of the forest villages of that district, pale and emaciated, with a touch of fever that made his eyes even brighter than usual. There was something so noble and unworldly in the expression of his countenance that those who saw him once never forgot him.

When the Dardanelles expedition was decided upon, it was he, as every one knows, who commanded the French corps. At Gallipoli he was wounded the second time by a Turkish bomb which struck him as he stood among his staff, throwing him three or four metres into the air, and injuring him so terribly that his arm had to be hastily amputated on the steamer which carried him back to France. He had also a

severe wound in the pelvis. When I was on leave in Paris, a few weeks later, I went to see him in a nursing home in the rue Bizet. He was stretched out on a sofa, unable to move, but he said to me in a perfectly quiet tone: "In two months at latest I shall be able to walk with a stick, and then I shall go back to my command at the front."

And, incredible as it seems, he did.

At a quarter past four o'clock in the morning of July 15th the Kronprinz's soldiers left their trenches and rushed toward the French lines. Every detail of our defense had been carefully rehearsed and worked smoothly; the signalmen left on the first line threw up rockets to give notice of the enemy's approach, and immediately our barrage fire fell on the German first positions. Our first line was held by a small number of picked men, with a few intrepid officers. Officers and men knew that nine-tenths of them must die where they stood, and were prepared to sell their lives dear. Their task was to retard and scatter the enemy, and they fulfilled it to the end. Some of the heroic deeds done that day have already passed into history. For instance, at Mont Sans-Nom, half a platoon, fifteen or twenty men at most, led by a captain, stood firm for twelve hours, from five o'clock in the morning until five in the afternoon, all that time surrounded and almost submerged by a flood of Germans, but always in communication with the rear by means of pigeons and wireless telegraphy. An infantry major was not far off with his men, also surrounded. They all held out un-

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til the order came from their division to save themselves if they could, whereupon the major, the captain, and the handful of men that were left opened a path to the lines at the point of the bayonet, bringing back with them fourteen prisoners.

The assaulting waves found themselves caught and scattered among these islands of French resistance, and when, at last, they reached our principal line, two or three kilometres to the rear, the force of their attack was three-fourths spent, and they did no serious harm to Gouraud's front.

By noon the French commanders had a distinct impression that the day was ours. As a general of an army corps said in popular terms: "The Boche's paw is smashed."

At that time this was our situation: on Gouraud's front, to the right, our troops still held their advance positions; and on our centre the enemy had only got as far as our intermediary positions; on the left he had reached the Roman road and the woods southeast of Prunay.

From that moment the Germans were checked. We learned from our first prisoners that the Kaiser had watched the battle from Ludendorff's house at Blanc-Mont, waiting, no doubt, for the hour of his triumphal entry into Châlons. But he never did get into Châlons, nor into Nancy—nor Paris!

In the evening of the 16th Gouraud announced victory to his troops in this order of the day:

"During the 15th of July you broke the push of

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fifteen German divisions, supported by ten more. They were ordered to reach the Marne by evening; you stopped them short, and we have fought and won the battle on the spot we had chosen.

"You have all every right to be proud; the heroic infantrymen and riflemen who signalled the attack, the aviators who watched it, the battalions and batteries who broke it, and the staffs who prepared for it so carefully.

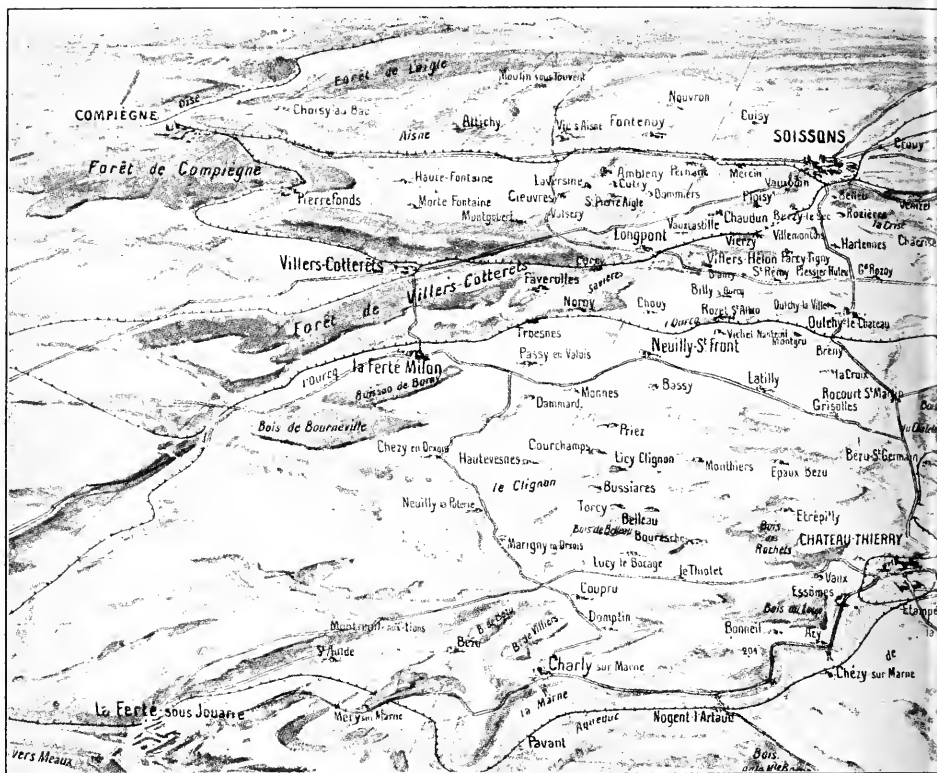
"The blow to the enemy is severe. It is a glorious day for France.

"I count on you to do as well if the enemy should dare to attack again, and I thank you with all a soldier's heart."

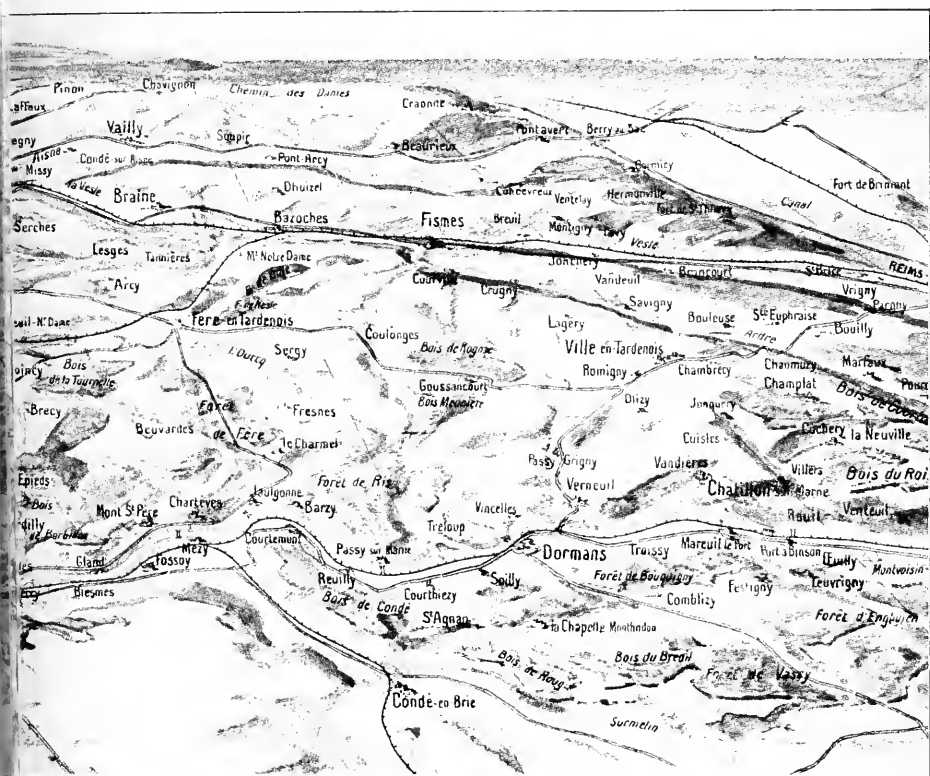
An American division in Gouraud's army fought side by side with our poilus, and with the most splendid courage. These young troops, who for the most part were under fire for the first time, bore themselves like veterans. In one trench where they fought in company with French chasseurs more than sixty German dead were counted on a stretch of a couple of hundred metres.

Berthelot's army held the left sector, between Rheims and the Marne; its defense was equally heroic, and it was here that the Germans tried their hardest. The enveloping movement by which the Montagne de Rheims and the city was to be taken was not the only one intended; General Fritz von Below expected to break the front of Berthelot's army between Rheims





Field of the second



ble of the Marne.





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and the Marne, and von Einem was to do the same thing to Gouraud's between Rheims and the Main de Massiges, north of Châlons.

The Germans came on so furiously that our lines, held by Franco-Italian troops, were somewhat bent by the savage thrust, and the Italians lost the wooded slopes of Bligny and Champlat. We were driven back almost to the outskirts of the forest of Rheims, but held our second positions firmly.

On the sector more to the left, along the Marne, between Château-Thierry and Mareuil, another German army, under von Boehn, had better luck. Six of their divisions succeeded in crossing the river between Jaulgonne and Verneuil, and climbed the heights to the south of Jaulgonne. The fighting around the villages of Reuilly and Courtièsy was stubborn, and when night came our troops had lost some ground, and the Germans had a foothold in the villages of Saint-Agnan and La Chapelle-Monthodon. On the evening of July 15th they had advanced five kilometres south of the Marne, but farther to the left, west of Fossoy, American troops threw them back beyond the river.

Cheered by their local success, the Germans tried to follow it up by enlarging toward Epernay the "pocket" made in the right bank of the Marne, but they were driven back by some sharp French counter-attacks, and the villages of Saint-Agnan and La Chapelle were ours again. Von Boehn tried with all his might to get them back, but only succeeded in taking the hamlet of Montvoisin, ten kilometres from Epernay.

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When evening came on the 17th of July all looked bright for us; the great defensive battle was three-quarters won. The vast front on which it raged may be divided into three sectors:

- I. Before Gouraud's army, between Rheims and the Main de Massiges, the Germans were completely checked.
- II. Before Berthelot's, between Rheims and the Marne, the enemy had been able to advance, but our second positions were untouched and already the Franco-Italian troops, not content with stubborn resistance, were beginning to win back ground.
- III. Between Château-Thierry and Cailly the Germans had got six divisions across the Marne, but they could go no farther, and their position south of the river seemed hazardous.

On the whole the generalissimo was well satisfied that evening. The German push was well in hand, and the enormous salient made into the French lines by their offensive of May 27th on the Chemin des Dames was only a gain in case they were able to enlarge it still further in another advance; if they could not, its exposure to flank attacks made it a positive danger. Now General Foch had proved at the battle of the Marne that he was a past master in that sort of strategy.

As the Boche was checked at every point, the hour

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for a counter-attack had manifestly come. It was now time for the generalissimo to pass from defensive to offensive warfare, which is, according to Napoleon, "the most difficult of all the operations of war; the right moment for it can only be grasped by a man of the highest talent."

### FOCH'S RETURN THRUST

One of the chief reasons why Germany was bound to lose the war is that throughout she made gross mistakes as to the psychology of her adversaries; France in the first place, then England, and later America. She also greatly underestimated the military strength which each of these countries could bring to bear against her.

These errors, and this faulty reckoning, vowed her to defeat; if we should seek an explanation for the causes which led to them, we might find some such explanation as this:

The Germans enjoyed a flourishing *material* civilization, but, on the other hand, they had no *moral* civilization whatever. The way in which they provoked and carried on the war, their obscene barbarity of conduct (in which officers and privates were alike), the nameless and innumerable crimes which marked their passage through Belgium and France—cities burned to the ground, old and hallowed monuments wantonly destroyed, thousands of innocent victims massacred, thousands more reduced to famine or carried into

hideous slavery, organized robbery and looting—all constitute the most monstrous offense against justice and humanity which has ever been committed by a great people, and for this they are one and all responsible, from the Kaiser down to the meanest of his subjects.

The world has been pushed backward twenty or even thirty centuries, and those who wrought the evil must suffer for it. We should be wanting in our most sacred duty to our dead and to those who will come after us if through fatigue or moral weakness we allow the war to pass into history without inflicting signal punishment on those who brought it on joyously and waged it vilely.

Many of their misdeeds could not have been committed if the Germans had had any true morality, or any real morale. And if a man has no moral standards himself, how can he measure and appreciate those of his enemies? He can form no idea of them; what Bismarck called "the imponderables" do not exist for him. The shadowy domain of the moral forces, from which they rule the world of men, is an unknown country to the Germans; they grope about in it, go astray, and lose themselves. At the outbreak of the war, misled by appearances, and only accustomed to look at the outside of things, they stupidly decided that France would crumble in a few weeks; they had not the slightest conception of the inexhaustible reserves of courage, will, and endurance on which our country could draw.

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The Germans did not understand the English character, and still less that of the Americans. They believed that the worship of the almighty dollar was so firmly established and love of comfort and peace so deep-rooted that nothing would induce the United States to go to war. They could not understand the American idealism, of which we have had such a magnificent example in France—an army of a million and a half of men rushing within a year to take part in this new crusade against the barbarians; against those who have been “traitors to humanity.”

The Germans made the mistake of underrating the strength of their opponents at the second battle of the Marne. They were convinced that the French army was incapable of coming back with a counter-attack. Since their successes of the 21st of March and the 27th of May they had been fairly bursting with vanity; they believed that the Allies were only fit to be their butt and would continue to be maltreated without hitting back.

That explains their complete surprise at our counter-offensive. Foch's plan, which was at the same time very simple and extremely ingenious, consisted in taking advantage of the salient formed by the German front to throw two Franco-American armies, those of General Mangin and General Dégoutte, against their flank between Soissons and Château-Thierry.

The final orders for the attack were given on the night of the 17th and 18th. Mangin's army stretched between the Aisne and the Ourcq; that of Dégoutte

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from the Ourcq to Clignon, where it joined the American troops. A furious storm during the night fortunately covered the last preparations for the advance.

The Boches, who had no idea that anything was going to happen, were all snugly underground in their dug-outs when at the appointed time, thirty-five minutes past four in the morning, thousands of guns opened a terrific bombardment, and at the same moment our infantry flung themselves forward, led by an army of tanks. The surprise of the Germans was as complete as we could have wished. By noon Mangin's men had reached Saconin-Brouil and Vierzy; they swept past Chaudun, Villers-Hélon, and Mauroy-sur-Ourcq. Whole German staffs were caught in their headquarters; guns were counted by the hundred and prisoners by the thousand, and farther to the south Dégoutte's army and the American troops were having a like success.

The Germans, stunned by this smashing blow, hastily brought up their reserves, but to no purpose; on the 19th the Allied troops continued to advance, and Mangin reached the heights directly above Soissons.

This triumphant advance had immediate results. The German General Staff, conscious of peril, began to call back those divisions which were at the southern extremity of the salient, an operation which the Franco-American troops took good care to interfere with, attacking all along the line, from Soissons to Rheims. During the night of the 19th and 20th the German divisions which had crossed the Marne found themselves in evil case, harassed and attacked from

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all sides. Incessantly pounded by our artillery and tormented by our aviators, they were forced to recross the river on shaky foot-bridges, which were demolished every few minutes by our guns. The roads were blocked by a swarm of retreating columns and supply-trains, on which our aviators and artillerymen poured tons of projectiles. At daybreak on the 20th the southern bank of the Marne was lined with Franco-American troops.

That day Mangin and Dégoutte pursued their course eastward; while Berthelot continued to gain ground between Rheims and the Marne. We had already 20,000 prisoners and 400 guns, and the American divisions on Dégoutte's right had gained a foothold on the plateau of Etrepilly, which overlooks Château-Thierry. This town, the birthplace of La Fontaine, the most national of all our poets, was liberated by the Americans in the night of the 20th after having been occupied by the enemy for fifty days. On the 22d, 23d, and 24th of July our offensive advance was still more marked. The army of Mangin got as far as Oulchy-la-Ville; Dégoutte went well beyond the road leading from Soissons to Château-Thierry. At the southern end of the salient the Americans crossed the Marne at many places between Château-Thierry and Dormans, and pushed boldly forward toward the north in the forests of Fère and Ris.

It was only natural that the fighting should have raged most fiercely between the Marne and Rheims, for the pivot of the German resistance was there; if

that was carried their retreat would become a rout. Berthelot's army, reinforced by British divisions, had a very stiff task, for the Germans threw in three of their finest divisions, choice troops which they had been keeping in reserve. The struggle lasted until the 26th, when the Germans, worn-out, at last made up their minds to retreat, and General Gouraud seized the opportunity to retrieve, by a brilliant stroke, some of the ground which he had voluntarily given up at the beginning of the battle.

During the night of the 26th and 27th the enemy was in full retreat on all the line from the valley of the Ourcq, southeast of Oulchy-le-Château, as far as the valley of the Aisne, above Bligny. We also took Fère-en-Tardenois. The Germans, although they had been obliged to diminish their salient, still strove to hold on to their two pivots of Soissons and Rheims, but on the 29th one of these pivots was rudely shaken by General Mangin. On the 1st of August the Allied armies renewed their attack, with the object of throwing the mass of the enemy's forces back to the Vesle, and Mangin's army, reinforced by British troops, carried the villages of Grand-Rosoy, Beugneux, and Hartennes. The Germans were obliged to evacuate Soissons, as it was in imminent danger, and on the 2d of August, at six o'clock in the evening, the chasseurs of General Vuillemin entered the city. On all the front our advance continued. Ville-en-Tardenois was regained, and in the morning of the 3d we held the banks of the Aisne and the Vesle from Soissons to



## FOCH, GENERALISSIMO

Fismes, the outskirts of which were occupied by Americans. In twenty-four hours we had advanced ten kilometres and had retaken more than fifty villages. On the 4th of August, after very severe fighting, the Americans got into Fismes.

From the 5th of August we held the southern banks of the Aisne and the Vesle from Soissons to Rheims; the masterly manoeuvre which Foch had started on the 18th of July had come to an end so far as that part of the front was concerned, and with the most inspiring success. The salient which the Germans had driven into our lines after the victory of the Chemin des Dames was reduced by three-quarters, and their losses in prisoners and guns were very heavy. But those material losses were trifling compared with the serious injury to their morale. Ludendorff was stunned by Foch's blow; he appeared to have lost all initiative, and the situation was completely reversed. The German army, instead of attacking, had now to suffer our attacks; the high command seemed to be disabled and incapable of pulling itself together for any effective action. The high command of the Allies, on the contrary, had never been in better form. The battle just fought and won had brought out like a search-light the splendid qualities of our staff and had confirmed the wisdom of the unity of command; under the orders of Foch, French, British, Americans, and Italians had all had their share in this great victory, the final turning-point of the war. Each had done brilliantly, and to all honor is due.

# FOCH

## THE AMERICANS IN THE BATTLE

One distinctive characteristic of this battle is the part played in it by the American divisions. For the first time a large number of American troops found themselves engaged in military operations on a vast scale; they were about to undergo a decisive ordeal.

They came out from it with flying colors. The gallantry of their fighting, the skill of their officers, the heroism of individual men, excited the wonder and admiration of every Frenchman who came in contact with them. Many of my comrades were delighted to bear witness to their courage and their coolness; General Dégoutte, who is certainly an authority on the subject, said of the divisions which took Château-Thierry: "I couldn't have done better with my 'Marocaine.' " (The general was for a long time in Morocco, commanding the famous division which is one of the glories of our army; all its regiments have the "fourragère," and their flags are decorated with the Legion of Honor.)

In the stirring order of the day addressed by General Pershing to his troops after the victory he designated a certain number of these divisions; the First, the Second, the Third, the Fourth, the Twenty-sixth, the Twenty-eighth, the Thirty-second, and the Forty-second—eight in all. The American staff is sparing of details touching the brilliant part played by its units; it thinks more of preparing for the successes of to-morrow than of celebrating the conquests of yes-

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terday, and this is easily understood. But in the meantime, before the full official account is published, I may give here a few stories of the young Americans, told me by French officers.

The divisions which were echeloned on the southern bank of the Marne, between Château-Thierry and Jaulgonne, made an admirable defense when the German attack was launched; at one part of the front, between Fossoy and Crezancy the enemy was stopped short. He had more luck, however, to the eastward, where he pushed aside some French troops and crossed the river. The Americans, finding their right flank menaced, made a bend five kilometres long in their positions, fighting on the defensive all the way. They carried out this difficult manœuvre under heavy fire with perfect coolness, and held their positions until July 20th, when the German retreat began. The Americans then hurled themselves in pursuit, and two days later the villages of Jaulgonne, Hartèves, and Mont-Saint-Père had been retaken. The fighting on the wooded slopes which rise above Charmel was very stiff; in the night of the 25th the Americans outflanked the village, and by dawn they were masters of the hills. On the 27th they reached the source of the Ourcq, and carried Ronchères. After twelve days of heavy fighting since they left the Marne, they found themselves in a very difficult country, on the south border of the Meunière wood, and there they were relieved.

Another division went into action on the slopes of

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Ronchères and fought its way steadily in the direction of Fismes, reaching there on the 5th of August. It is an interesting detail that it was largely made up of Wisconsin regiments, many of whose men were German-Americans who proved their loyalty to their adopted country by shedding their blood for her.

On the 30th of July they attacked the wood of Grimpettes, after a short artillery preparation, and occupied its southeast corner. The Germans resisted obstinately, counter-attacking vigorously, and pushing back the Americans' advanced positions. The struggle became more and more bitter; much of it was hand-to-hand. The next day, the 31st, the Americans managed to seize all the wood, crushing some nests of machine-guns intended to stop their progress to Cierges. That village, which lay in a hollow, was drowned in asphyxiating gases; instead of trying to enter it, they went around and with one great rush took the northern slopes above. Then, after a short pause, they cleared out the wood of Joublets, and during this time a French division on the right advanced on Leroy, coming out of the Meunière wood.

On the 1st of August the Americans made another leap forward, to find themselves faced by very heavy obstacles; the Reddy farm and "côte 230." But ever since they came into the fighting they had shown a talent for manœuvring and were already well versed in infantry tactics; they were also masters in the art of outflanking, and skilful in the use of machine-guns, automatic rifles, and field-mortars. Again they were

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more than a match for the Germans, and "côte 230" was carried at the first assault, the Americans taking seventy prisoners. After that time the enemy was shy of facing them, often leaving only a sparse rear-guard, which was promptly swept away. Toward evening on the 2d of August the Americans were north of Dravegny, having pushed on six or seven kilometres farther. For three days their infantry had been fighting continuously, notwithstanding the great difficulty of getting food, as the supply-trains could only come by one very narrow road, which was soaked by heavy rains. Notwithstanding all drawbacks they went steadily in, until they reached the line that passes Bouleaux, where they found all approaches swept by German artillery and machine-guns.

The Americans had to fold back upon themselves again, executing the same difficult manœuvre as before; the division wheeled around the enemy's bases and got as far as the sloping ground north of Mont-Saint-Martin, having made another bend, this time of seven kilometres.

A last heroic effort brought them to Fismes and the valley of the Vesle, not without heavy sacrifices. The fighting on the 4th of August was very severe; the Germans held Fismes in force, but the Americans kept up a steady fire with field-mortars and some 37-mm. guns, and by nightfall were within a kilometre of the village.

Rain fell heavily all night, hindering their movements and making the task ahead of them harder, but

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as soon as day broke again, after their artillery had somewhat prepared the way, they made their final assault. When they got into the town the fighting was from house to house and hand to hand; each house was an island of resistance, but when night fell again the job was almost done; the Germans only clung to the northern end of the village, and the next day they were finally driven out and forced to cross the Vesle. This division had left Ronchères on the 30th of July; in six days it had fought its way successfully for eighteen kilometres, ending up by storming Fismes.

I must end this brief and incomplete history by some mention of the brilliant work done by troops already well known in the French army as the "Yankee Division," which had the honor of relieving the American Marine Corps after it had won immortality in the Belleau Wood.

The Yankee Division held the sector northeast of Château-Thierry, between Bassiars and Vaux, on the road from Château-Thierry to La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, having two French divisions on its right and left. On the 18th of July, at thirty-five minutes past four in the morning, the Yankees attacked vigorously although somewhat handicapped because their left wing was far behind their right, and was therefore forced to advance very rapidly in order to straighten their line. The village of Torcy was carried in an hour, the Germans being taken entirely by surprise; Belleau and Givry were occupied, and the railway reached. The fighting in Givry was very grim. The

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French were to have taken "côte 193," but it held out, exposing the Americans to a heavy enfilading fire, through which they lost heavily. At last, with the help of the Americans, "côte 193" was taken, and the push went on; the villages of Epieds and Trugny were taken by storm, and the road from Jaulgonne to Fère-en-Tardenois reached. In six days the division had advanced seventeen kilometres, and had taken 248 prisoners, a heavy 210-mm. cannon, and many machine-guns, thus deserving (as did all the other American divisions) the high praise given them by Foch when he received the representatives of the Allied press: "As to the Americans, you may say that they are admirable soldiers; I have only one fault to find with them—they advance too fast—I am obliged to hold them back. They want to go forward all the time, and kill as many Germans as they possibly can."

When these gallant American divisions received their baptism of fire, fighting beside the war-hardened French troops, a decisive moment of the war had been reached. The comradeship, the brotherhood, of the Americans and the French was strengthened on the field of battle, and their blood, shed side by side in the same just cause, sealed forever the union of two great nations.

The decisive battle was won; won by the heroism of the men who fought in it; won by the genius of Foch who planned it.

On the 7th of August, 1918, at the proposal of M.

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Clémenceau, and with the concurrence of the President of the Republic, Foch was made a Marshal of France. M. Clémenceau wrote the following letter to M. Poincaré:

PARIS, August 6th, 1918.

*"Mr. President:*

"The decree of December 24th, 1916, revived for the first time the dignity of Marshal of France.

"I have the honor to submit for your signature, in the name of the government, and I may add in the name of all France, a decree conferring this great national recompense upon General Foch.

"At the moment when the enemy hoped, through a formidable offensive on a front of one hundred kilometres, to wrest a decision from us, and impose on us a German peace which would have meant the enthrallment of the world, General Foch and his wonderful soldiers have overthrown him.

"Paris freed from danger, Soissons and Château-Thierry reconquered by main force, more than 200 villages delivered, 35,000 prisoners and 700 guns taken, the hopes so loudly proclaimed by the enemy before his attack humbled in the dust, the glorious armies of the Allies carried in one victorious rush from the banks of the Marne to the borders of the Aisne—all these are the results of a manœuvre nobly planned by the High Command and worthily carried out by leaders beyond praise.

"The Republic and all our Allies had full confidence in the victor of the marshes of Saint-Gond, the illus-





*From a French official photograph.*

Presentation of the Marshal's baton to Foch.



## FOCH, GENERALISSIMO

trious leader of the battles of the Yser and the Somme, and their confidence has been fully justified.

"The dignity of Marshal of France conferred on General Foch will not only be a reward for past services; it will confirm the authority of the great warrior destined to lead the armies of the Entente to a decisive victory.

"GEORGES CLÉMENTEAU."

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE WIDENING BATTLE

THE day after Foch received this thrice-earned reward he began a new offensive. He had just beaten the Kronprinz of Germany; now it was the turn of the Kronprinz of Bavaria.

After the great victory of Champagne, the great victory of Picardy was to come; the deep salient which the Germans had carved into the French lines from below Arras toward Soissons was the field of a new manœuvre as brilliant as the first.

In the morning of the 8th of August the Fourth British Army, led by General Sir Henry Rawlinson, and the First French Army under General Debeney attacked from a point west of Orleans to one south of Montdidier.

The method of attack was the same as before. After a short but fierce artillery bombardment, the infantry, backed by a mass of tanks, threw itself upon the enemy's lines. The Germans were again entirely taken by surprise and again the victory was complete. In two days the First French Army advanced fourteen kilometres and took 14,000 prisoners. The British advance was equally remarkable, and 13,000 prisoners fell to their share. The French troops retook Montdidier with great gallantry, and our success went

## THE WIDENING BATTLE

on with almost incredible swiftness; within a few days the Germans lost 40,000 prisoners and 700 guns.

But this did not satisfy Foch; with the vision of genius he widened the area of attack still further. Humbert's army followed Debeney's into action, and the Boches fell back before it; then Mangin's, on the farther side of the Oise, came into the game, and dealt the enemy smashing blows; in a single day, the 20th of August, his troops advanced four kilometres and took 8,000 prisoners. Then he challenged the redoubtable Massif de St. Gobain, the keystone of the German defenses in France, nibbling and gnawing, little by little, into its massive pile.

The great battle grew ever wider, both to north and south. Now the whole British line broke into a blaze; Byng's army above Rawlinson's, Horn's army above Byng's; Plumer's army farther to the north—one after the other they came into action, and under their repeated strokes the Boche trembled and reeled. On all sides a general retreat began, a retreat during which the enemy lost thousands of prisoners, hundreds of guns, and munition depots too many to count. This mighty manœuvre of Foch's, moving his armies as a chess player of genius moves his pieces, is one of the finest things in the Great War.

An old English proverb says, "John Bull must be kicked before he's roused." For four years John Bull had received many kicks, and had returned them with interest; now he was fairly roused, and there was no stopping him. One victory followed another; the end

## FOCH

of the war was like a boxing-match when one of the fighters, having got the upper hand, showers blows on his adversary, not leaving him time to recover his breath.

On the 21st of August the Third and Fourth British Armies won the battle of Bapaume, at the end of ten days during which they had taken nearly 25,000 prisoners and 270 guns. On the 26th, before this fight was fairly finished, the First Army began the battle of Arras, cracking the famous Drocourt-Quéant line, fondly believed by the Germans to be impregnable, like a nut, and in one week taking 19,000 prisoners and 200 guns.

While the left wing of the Allies was thus winning laurels, Foch set the right wing in motion, and on September 12th the American army, which had so distinguished itself at the second battle of the Marne, attacked the famous salient of Saint Mihiel, which had held out against all our efforts for four years, to be effaced now as a skilful surgeon cuts off an evil growth by a stroke of his knife.

The Americans fought superbly, and took 15,000 prisoners as they advanced. Their next task was the exceedingly difficult one of clearing out the Argonne forest, which fairly bristled with machine-gun nests, and after getting through with that in the most effective manner they took part in General Gouraud's offensive, liberating Rheims, going beyond Rethel, and threatening the Germans in the direction of Charleville.

## THE WIDENING BATTLE

Foch now began to strike still harder with his left. The Fourth British Army left the Arras sector on the 27th of September, stormed the defenses of the Canal du Nord, and took Marcoing with 6,000 prisoners. The next day the great Flanders offensive began, almost four years later than the first, which was in October and November, 1914. But this time it was we who struck and the Germans who were pounded. Under the high command of the King of the Belgians; with General Dégoutte for his chief of staff, the Belgian army, one of our armies, and the Second British Army attacked with the utmost gallantry along a front of nearly thirty kilometres, and pressed forward vigorously.

The battle of Flanders and that of Cambrai were going on at the same time, and on the 29th of September the British troops and some American divisions succeeded in breaking the famous "Hindenburg line," taking 22,000 prisoners. A week later Cambrai and St. Quentin were occupied by the British and French troops, and the battle of Cambrai won.

On the 14th of October the Second British Army continued its advance in the valley of the Lys in the direction of Courtrai, forcing the Germans to evacuate our great industrial cities in the north—Lille, Roubaix, and Douai.

Now Foch attacked from all sides at once by a general advance along the whole line. The savage beast was at bay, and the hounds closed in on him.

The marshal's strategy was entirely devoid of any

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stiffness or pedantry; on the contrary, it was flexible, intelligent, and might even be called "opportunist," in that it adapted itself to changing circumstances, turning them all to account. Knowing that the German army was out of breath, had lost its best troops, and could call on no reserves, he felt that the moment had come to risk manœuvres that would have been hazardous at an earlier period. Imprudence was now safer than caution, and the only way to put a speedy end to the long struggle.

Foch explained his manœuvres himself in an interview given to my old friend, Gustave Babin, the war correspondent of the Paris *l'Illustration*, in his usual abrupt and picturesque speech, which gains savor from his slight southwestern accent:

"You see," he said, "it's a question of shouldering one's way through—one army advances, another follows; one after the other makes a push," and Babin said that he thrust his right shoulder forward, and then the left, with his closed fists held against his chest to show how the manœuvre worked.

"In order to parry our blows," the marshal went on, "they needed to gain time, to be able to pull themselves together somewhere. But we did not give them a chance—they had to fight, to save their necks. They had no end of material in a chain of different workshops, all ready for an advance on Paris, but we upset their programme on the 18th of July, and now we're taking one of their workshops after another, and they are falling back all the time, which means progres-





*From a photograph by Prillat, Metz.*

Marshal Foch at Metz.



## THE WIDENING BATTLE

sive confusion and disorganization. They need to get away from us, but they cannot shake us off; they have no reserves, and we are on their heels; no respite will be given them."

And he said at the end: "Victory is an inclined plane on which a moving body gains speed unless you stop it."

Here the master gives us himself the best explanation of his strategy, and we know its results. No army in the world has ever suffered such a series of defeats and such heavy losses as were inflicted on the Germans between July and November, 1918. In prisoners alone they lost 400,000 men. By the beginning of October Ludendorff knew that the game was irretrievably lost, and it was he who urged that the German Government should beg for peace on a Wilsonian basis.

The German army was already beaten, but Foch has admitted that if the armistice had not been signed he was prepared to deal a death-blow. On the 14th of November a tremendous offensive was to have been launched by twenty French and six American divisions from Pont-à-Moussons to Lunéville; its first aim was to envelop Metz, and its ultimate object to reach points absolutely vital to the enemy. To meet this menace the Germans had only an insufficient number of divisions, and those of inferior quality; the war would have ended for them in the most ignominious defeat ever known in history. It was in order to avert this that they signed the armistice, accepting the hardest

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and most humiliating clauses therein. When they say now that they were not beaten "from a military point of view" they lie, as they have lied throughout the war.

Compared to the strategy of Foch, which was of classic simplicity in its main lines, and intelligently flexible in application, the evolutions of armies fitting into each other like parts of a well-oiled machine, that of the greatest among the German leaders seems meagre and limited.

The cheap victories won by Hindenburg and Mackensen over the Russians and Rumanians need not be taken into consideration, as the conditions were so unequal that such "victories" do not count at all.

Germany is forever disgraced by her violation of Belgian neutrality, but let us set that aside for a moment and consider her military movements on the French front. Von Moltke, chief of the General Staff, allowed himself to be outgeneralled by Joffre at the Marne, and was so discredited thereby that the Kaiser removed him from command.

During the autumn of 1914 the Germans attacked on the Yser; in 1916 they attacked Verdun; both were frontal attacks, blows with a club, so to speak, devoid of any strategy—and both failed.

Two years later, when they were numerically superior owing to the man power and artillery at their disposal after the break-up of Russia, they made three attacks. Each was undoubtedly successful in the first few days, but each was soon stopped and led to noth-

## THE WIDENING BATTLE

ing. There did not seem to be any connection between their armies; when one was checked it merely stood still and marked time, giving its adversary ample opportunity to collect his resources. Their greatest effort on July 15th, 1918, met with overwhelming defeat.

The Allies were victorious in the Great War not only because of their loftier morale, but because they had the advantage of co-ordinated military talent in their leaders, which found its highest expression in the keen intelligence and strategic genius of their generalissimo—FOCH.



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ORDONON

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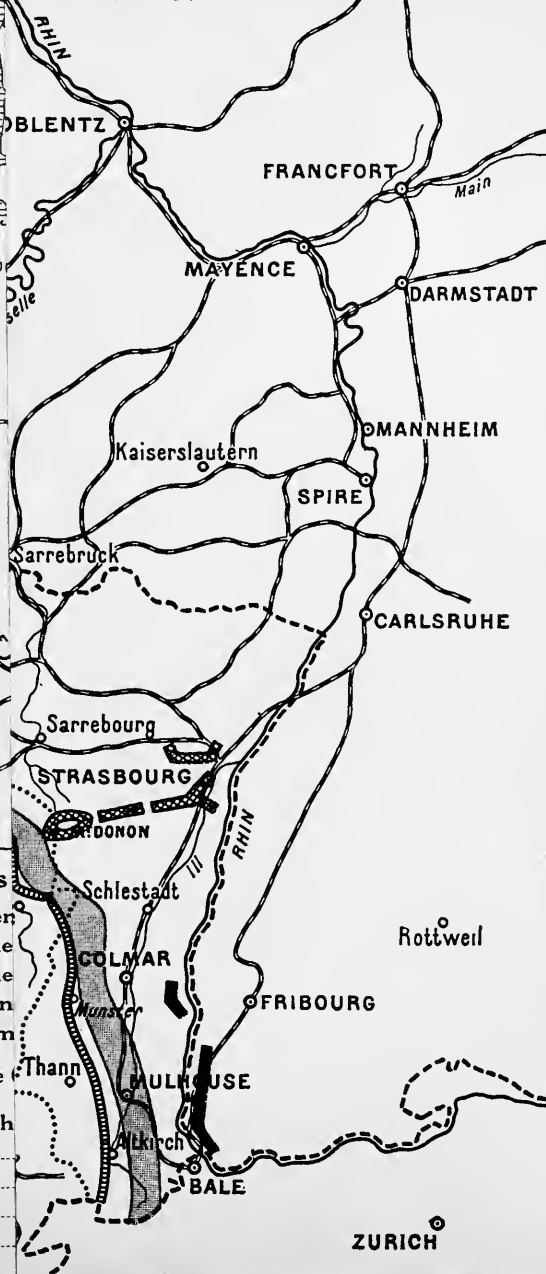
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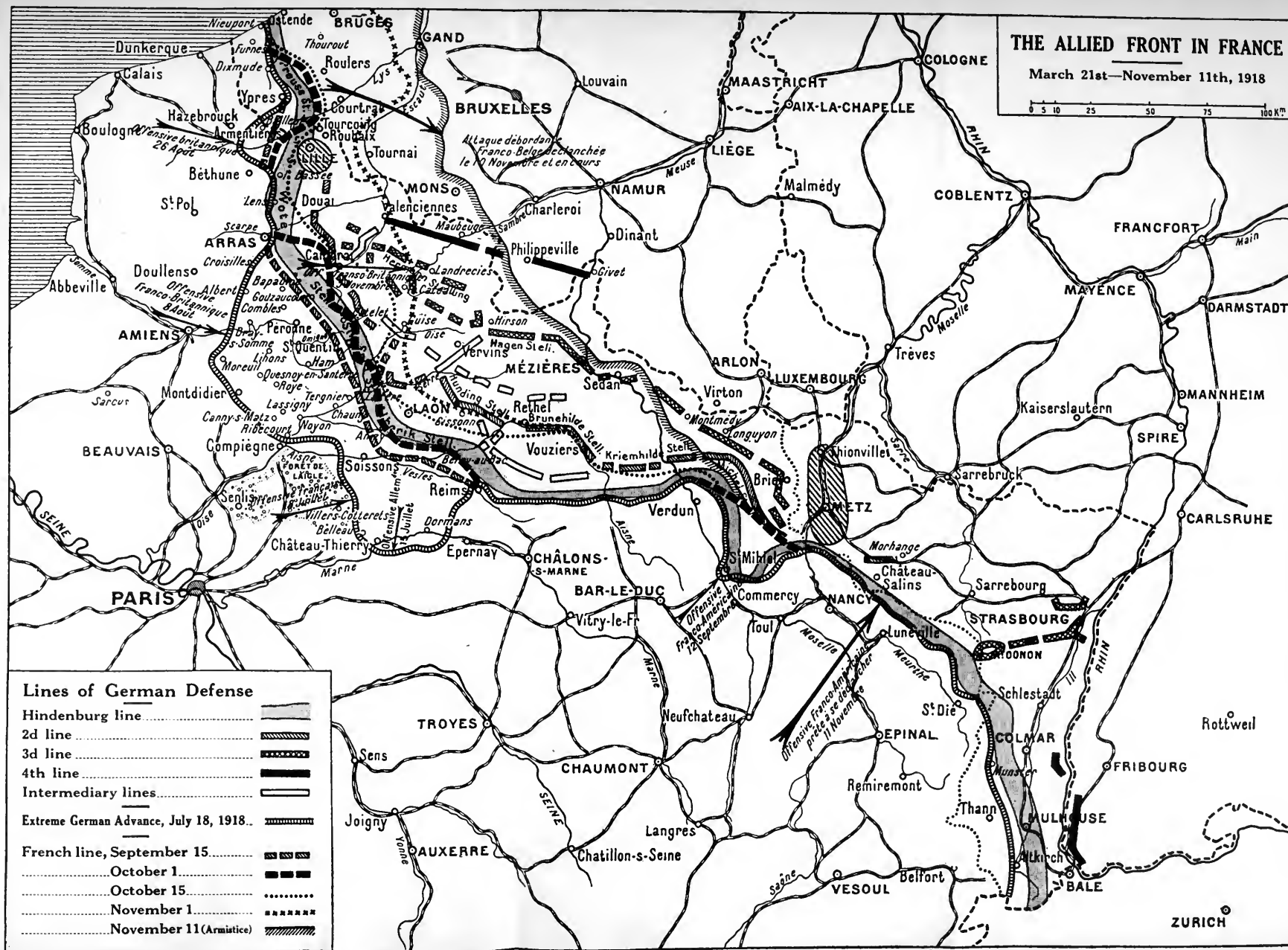




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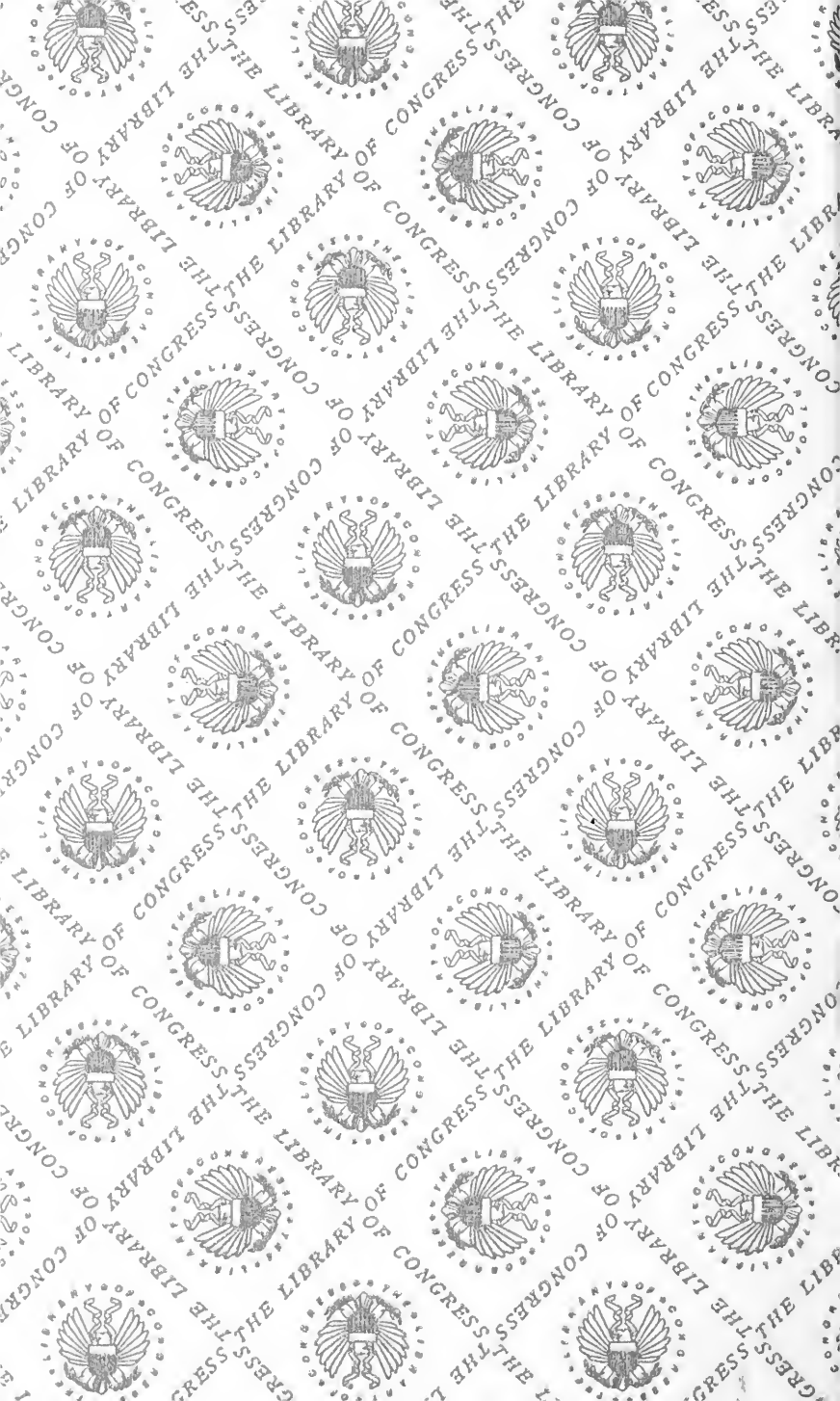












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